Compliance Biology, Inc., "Results of the Focused Western Spadefoot Toad Surveys on the Castaic Mesa Project Site" (2006; 2006B)

compliance·biology inc

2006 Toad

July 1, 2006

Newhall Land
23823 Valencia Boulevard
Valencia, California 91355
Attention: Ms. Kelley Coleman

Subject: Results of Focused Western Spadefoot Toad Surveys on the Castaic Mesa Project Site

Dear Ms. Coleman,

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 Castaic Mesa project site 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 project-related impacts to the species must be 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).

1936 North Croydon Avenue • Camarillo, California 93010 • 805.987.9184 fx 805.987.6594

METHODOLOGY

On February 20 and March 17, 2006 Compliance Biology surveyed the Castaic Mesa project site. The entire site was systematically transected during the daytime for the purpose of evaluating the potential presence of western spadefoot toad habitat. All of the flat lowlands and mesas on 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 repeated at night, on the same days that the daytime surveys were conducted, to determine if adult spadefoot toads were calling or could be observed foraging.

Surveys were conducted during the active breeding season for this species as evidenced by the identification of other known breeding populations in the region. Weather conditions were conducive to adult spadefoot activity. As such, it was expected that if western spadefoot were present on site, visible evidence of their presence would be detectable at the time of surveys.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Survey Location

The project site is situated south and southeast of Castaic Lagoon, northwest of Charlie Canyon, in Los Angeles County, California (**Exhibit 1**). The subject property occurs within three sections of two USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle maps. The western portion of the project is situated at T5N, R17W, in the northwest portion of Sections 25 of the Newhall, California quadrangle. The central portion of the site occurs at T5N, R16W in the northwestern quarter and a portion of the northeastern quarter of Section 30 of the same quadrangle, and the remaining portion is situated at T5N, R16W in Section 19 of the Newhall and the Warm Springs Mountain quadrangle (**Exhibit 2**).

Site Description

The subject property is characterized by variable topography including flat mesas in the central portion of the site. Hills and canyons surround the mesas and Castaic Creek is situated below a steep cliff on the western portion of the site. Elevation at the project site ranges from approximately 1,150 feet to approximately 1,660 feet above mean sea level in the northern-most portion of the site.

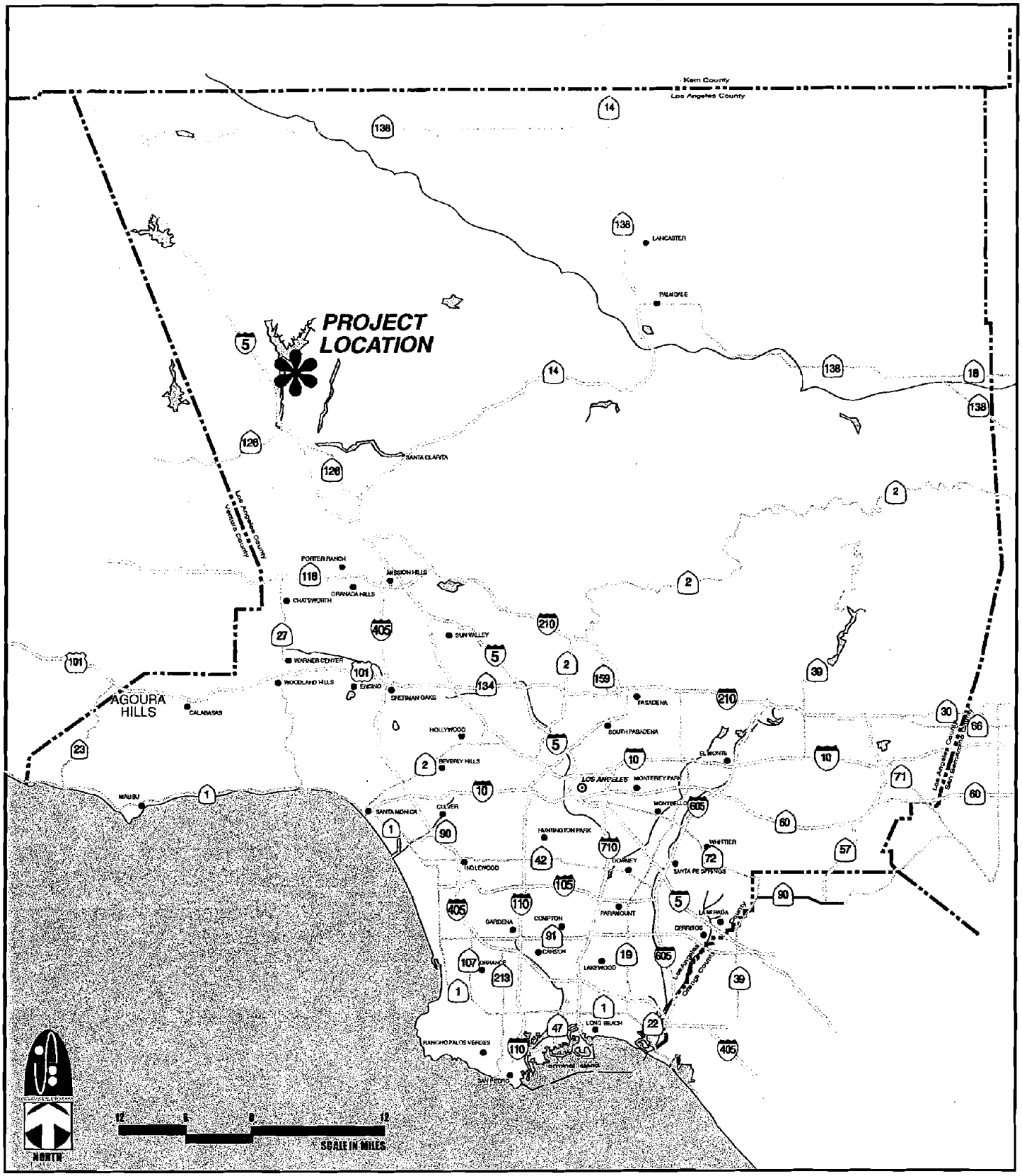

exhibit 1
Regional Location

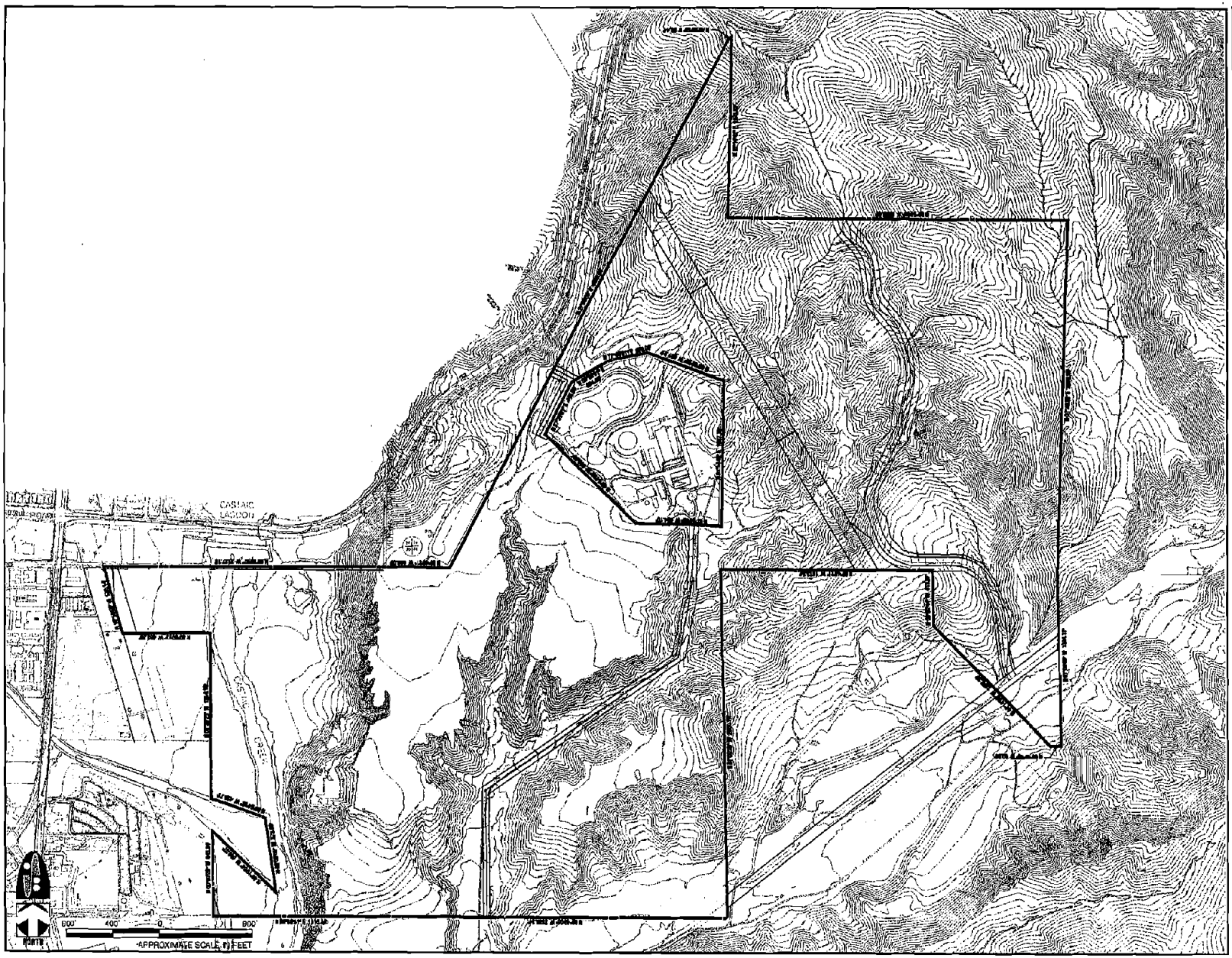

exhibit 2

SITE TOPOGRAPHY

RESULTS

During both daytime surveys, a few individual rainpools were observed near the central portion of the site, on and adjacent to the dirt road leading to the water treatment plant. No indications of spadefoot egg masses or tadpoles were observed during the daytime surveys in these pools. Regardless, it was determined that since potentially suitable rainpools were present, nighttime surveys should be conducted.

Despite suitable environmental conditions, no spadefoot toads were directly observed or heard calling during the nighttime surveys.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the focused surveys indicate that western spadefoot toad does not occur within the boundaries of the Castaic Mesa project site. Both daytime and nighttime surveys were conducted at times when this species was known to be active elsewhere in the region. Therefore, it is concluded the western spadefoot toad has a low potential to occur on the Castaic Mesa site.

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. June update, 2006. Commercial Version. Newhall and Warm Springs Mountain, 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.