



May 26, 2006

Mr. Matt Carpenter
Newhall Land Company
23823 Valencia Boulevard
Valencia, CA 91355

Subject: Results of Focused Western Spadefoot Toad Surveys on the Mission Village Project Site

Dear Mr. Carpenter,

The purpose of this letter report is to provide you with the results of focused surveys for the western spadefoot (*Spea* [Scaphiopus] *hammondi*) conducted on the Mission Village 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).

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 Village 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 Mission Village project site is one of those areas.

METHODOLOGY

On March 10 and March 23, 2004 Compliance Biology biologists surveyed the Mission Village project site. The entire site was 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 was expected that if western spadefoot were present on site, visible evidence of their presence would still be detectable at the time of surveys.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project area is located in Los Angeles County (**Exhibit 1**). The Mission Village project site is situated south of SR 126 along the north side of the Santa Clara River, west of the Magic Mountain amusement park (**Exhibit 2**).



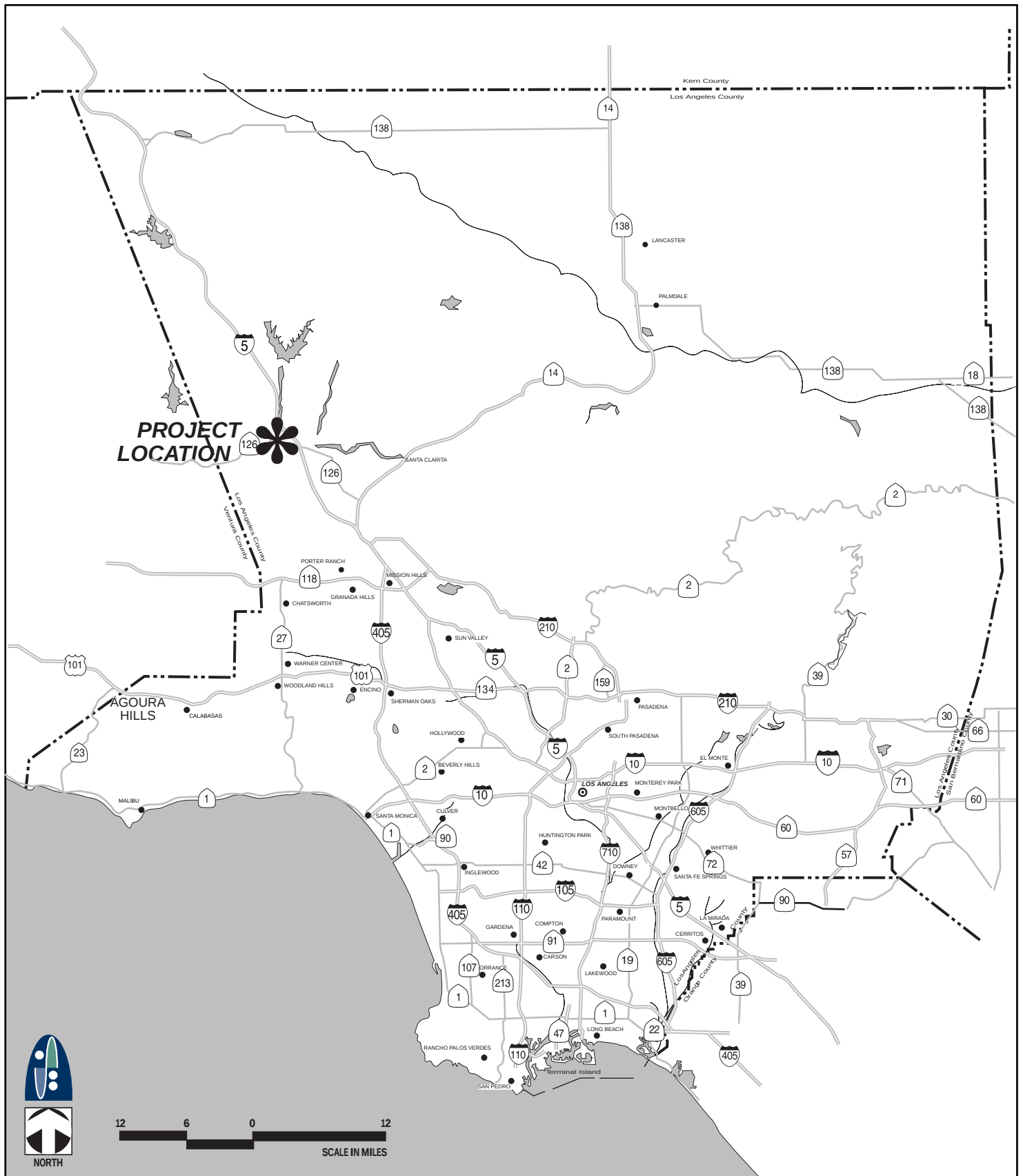
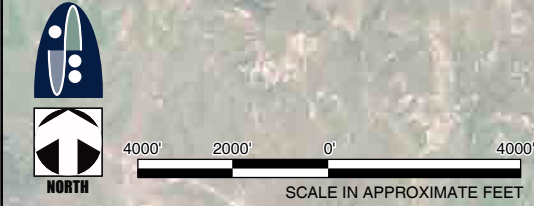
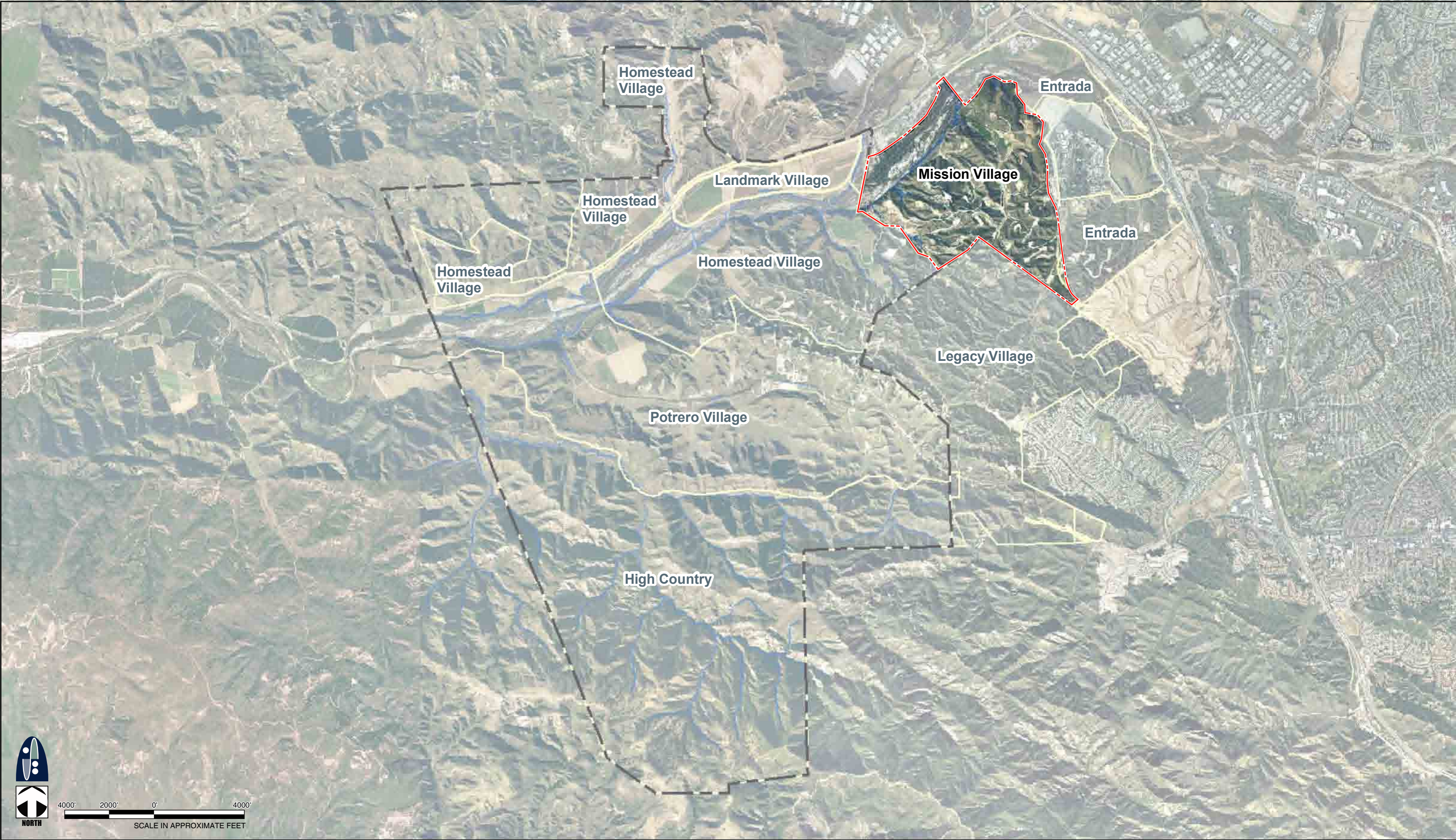


exhibit 1
Regional Location



The project site totals approximately 1,252 acres and supports a mosaic of scrub habitats including chaparral and coastal sage scrub with varying dominant species including chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), and black sage (*S. mellifera*). An extensive network of dirt roads occurs throughout the site as evidenced in **Exhibit 3**

RESULTS

One drying rainpool observed on the project site had indications of the presence of western spadefoot toad. The pool was nearly dry from the warm weather, but had several dead and drying tadpoles clustered in the lowest areas. A few of the tadpoles, though dead, were hydrated enough to make a positive identification. Another drying pool with desiccated tadpoles was identified just outside the western boundary of the Mission Village site. **Exhibit 4** illustrates the location of both occupied sites. Both of these pools appear to be the result of human activity including road construction and other earth movement.

Two additional depressions were observed on the Mission Village project site that supported cryptogammic soils (crusting layer with indications of algae and/or silt sediments), suggesting that they held standing water in the recent past. There were no direct observations or indications of the presence of western spadefoot at either of these depressions. However, because one location on site was determined to support spadefoot, and because there are suitable conditions elsewhere on site, there is a high potential for this species to occur throughout most of the lower and flatter areas within the Mission Village project boundaries.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the focused surveys indicate that western spadefoot toad does occur within the boundaries of the Mission Village project site. One specific location was identified on site and one adjacent to the site. Two additional seasonal rainpools that may provide suitable breeding habitat in wetter years were also observed.





SOURCE: Base and Aerial-Forma Systems, 5/2/06.

LEGEND

● Occupied Pool

Because the western spadefoot toad is considered a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game, impacts to western spadefoot toad must be considered when evaluating proposed project impacts pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act. Elimination of breeding and upland seasonal habitats for this special-status species would be considered potentially significant without mitigation.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

To impacts to western spadefoot toads would be reduced, prior to grading or other site preparations, a final focused survey should be conducted on the project site during the last breeding season (late winter to early spring) prior to any grading activities. Any egg masses and/or tadpoles discovered within the subject area should be collected, with the permission of CDFG, such that they can be maintained at an appropriate rearing facility for possible relocation of the animals to approved mitigation areas. Any such relocation or other potential mitigation would require approval from CDFG and the lead agency.

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.