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Central Region
1234 East Shaw Avenue
Fresno, California 93710
(559) 243-4005

November 20, 2012

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report
for the Preparation of a Land Management Plan for the Carrizo Plain
Ecological Reserve, San Luis Obispo County

Dear Interested Party:

Introduction

In accordance with Section 15063 of the Guidelines for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the California Department of Fish and Game (Department), as Lead Agency, intends to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Land Management Plan for the Carrizo Plain Ecological Reserve (draft LMP). In accordance with Section 15082 of the CEQA Guidelines, the Department has issued this Notice of Preparation to provide information about the project and its potential environmental effects to Responsible, Federal and Trustee Agencies and other interested parties, and to invite comments regarding the scope of analysis to be provided in the EIR.

The determination to prepare an EIR was made by the Department based on an Initial Study (CD attached) which was prepared in accordance with the CEQA Guidelines Section 15063. The Initial Study generally identifies the potential adverse environmental effects of the project.

In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines, the comment period for this Notice of Preparation and Initial Study is 30 days, beginning on **November 21, 2012 and ending on December 21, 2012 at 5PM**. The Department welcomes agency and public input during this review period. In the event that no response or well justified request for additional time is received by any Responsible, federal or Trustee Agency by the end of the review period, the Department may presume that such agencies have no response. Comments may be submitted to:

Contact: California Department of Fish and Game
Attn: Bob Stafford, Environmental Scientist
1234 E. Shaw Ave.
Fresno, CA 93710

Email: bstafford@dfg.ca.gov

Phone: (805) 528-8670

The Department has scheduled a Public Scoping Meeting on **Monday December 3, 2012, at 7:00 p.m.** at the education center for the San Luis Obispo Sportsmen's Association. The education center is located on Highway 1 between Morro Bay and San Luis Obispo at 3272 Gilardi Road. All interested parties are invited to attend the scoping meeting to provide comments on the scope and content of the environmental analysis.

For your convenience, a cd of the IS is included in this package. Please contact us at the letterhead address above if you would like hard copies of the aforementioned documents.

Background

The Carrizo Plain Ecological Reserve (CPER) is located within and immediately west of the Carrizo Plain - a large inland valley within the Inner Coast Range Mountains in southeastern San Luis Obispo County, central California. The approximately 50-mile-long, 15-mile-wide Carrizo Plain is bounded by the Temblor Range to the east and the Caliente Range to the west, while the Transverse Range separates the Carrizo Plain region from southern California. Approximately one half of the CPER is located within the Carrizo Plain and adjacent Caliente Range. The other half of the reserve is located to the west along the eastern boundary of the La Panza Range and Cuyama Valley (Figures 1, 2, and 3, attached).

The CPER is an approximately 39,500-acre area managed by the Department to protect threatened and endangered plants and animals and the important ecological communities found within and adjacent to the Carrizo Plain. The CPER supports a rich mosaic of ecological communities including blue oak woodlands, coastal scrub, chaparral, grasslands, juniper woodland, desert scrub, riparian systems, and ponds. To date, 535 plant and 283 animal species have been documented on the CPER, including 57 species considered endangered, threatened, sensitive, or fully protected by the Department or US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Limited public recreation, largely in the form of hunting and wildlife viewing, occurs in varying extents throughout the CPER.

The CPER links federal land managed as part of the two-million-acre Los Padres National Forest, to the west, and public lands within the 250,000-acre Carrizo Plain National Monument to the east, which are managed by the Bureau of Land Management in cooperation with the Department and The Nature Conservancy. Lands within the CPER have been identified as part of an essential landscape linkage connecting the Coast Range Mountains to the San Joaquin Valley.

Land within the CPER was acquired by the Department and designated as an ecological reserve to “*protect threatened or endangered native plants, wildlife, or aquatic organisms or specialized habitat types, both terrestrial and non-marine aquatic, or large heterogeneous natural gene pools for the future use of mankind*” (§1580 of the Fish and Game Code). Generally speaking, the CPER acquisitions were designed to protect threatened and endangered species, and upland and grassland habitats.

Description of the Project

California Fish and Game Code Section 1019 requires the Department to prepare land management plans for ecological reserves. Accordingly, the Department intends to adopt an LMP for the Carrizo Plain Ecological Reserve. The purpose of the draft LMP is to set forth the goals, objectives, and actions for management of the Department’s lands within the Carrizo Plain Ecological Reserve consistent with the requirements of Section 1580 of the California Fish and Game Code. The primary objective of the LMP is to protect the natural habitats that contribute to, and help sustain, the overall ecosystem health of the region. The specific purposes of the Carrizo Plain Ecological Reserve LMP are:

- To guide the adaptive management of habitats, species, and programs described herein to achieve the department's mission to protect and enhance wildlife diversity values.
- To serve as a guide for appropriate public uses of the property.
- To serve as a descriptive inventory of fish, wildlife and native plant habitats which occur on or use this property.
- To provide an overview of the property's operation and maintenance, and personnel requirements to implement management goals.
- To provide a description of potential and actual environmental impacts and subsequent mitigation which may occur during management, and to provide environmental documentation to comply with state and federal statutes and regulations.

The draft LMP will be organized as follows:

Section 1 – Introduction. Section 1 will provide a description of the current conditions and land use, which were evaluated in development of the plan, as well as the purpose of the Land Management Plan.

Section 2 – Property Description. Section 2 will discuss the abiotic (non-biological) conditions, including geology, hydrology, historic land use, cultural resources, infrastructure, and current uses of the Reserve lands.

Section 3 – Habitat and Species Description. Section 3 will discuss in detail the biological resources of the Reserve including the plant communities (i.e. vegetation), common animal species and special status species.

Section 4 – Management Goals and Environmental Impacts. This section will provide the detailed management goals for the Reserve, including the steps that will be taken to manage the biological resources, while providing for compatible public uses and maintaining the facilities.

Section 5 -- Operations and Maintenance Summary – Section 5 will describe the resources that are needed to implement the plan, including both staff time and outside costs, designed to guide work plans and budgeting for the Reserve.

References and Appendices – The references will list documents and other sources of information used to prepare the plan. The appendices will provide detailed information including plant and animal lists, a discussion of public input that informed development of the plan, and the environmental impact report (EIR).

As discussed above, the draft LMP will identify the goals and actions for management of the CPER, which are broadly designed to manage and enhance biological resources while providing for wildlife-dependent public use. Management is outlined in three hierarchical levels: elements, goals, and tasks. The elements are the management categories or considerations; the goals identify the conditions management is designed to achieve; and tasks are the steps that will be taken to attain the goals.

The management goals and actions will include the following topical elements:

- **Biological Elements:** These elements consist of species, habitats, or landscapes for which specific management goals have been developed within the plan.
- **Scientific Research, Monitoring, and Adaptive Management Elements:** These elements describe how scientific research and monitoring can be used as part of an adaptive management framework to promote long-term effectiveness of management at attaining the goals of the other elements.

- **Vegetation Management Elements:** These elements identify how fire management, managed grazing, and exotic plant management, can be used to maintain or enhance the condition of the vegetation to attain the biological goals of the plan.
- **Public Use Elements:** Public use elements are any recreational, scientific, or other public use activity appropriate to and compatible with the purposes for which the property was acquired.
- **Cultural Resources Elements:** Cultural resource elements pertain to preservation of cultural resources.
- **Facility Maintenance Elements:** This is a general-purpose element describing the maintenance and administrative program, which helps maintain orderly and beneficial management of the area.
- **Management and Monitoring Coordination Elements:** These elements include activities related to the coordination of management and monitoring in adjacent and regional open space lands.

A complete description of the project is provided in the attached Initial Study.

Probable Environmental Effects

The attached Initial Study provides an overview of potential environmental impacts associated with the draft LMP. The areas of potentially significant impacts include:

- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology
- Water Quality

In addition, the draft LMP may have environmental impacts that are cumulatively considerable.

If you have any questions about the project or this Notice, please contact Bob Stafford, Environmental Scientist, California Department of Fish and Game, at: (805) 528-8670 or by electronic mail: BSTAFFORD@dfg.ca.gov .

Sincerely,

November 20, 2012
Page 6

Jeffrey R. Single, Ph.D.,
Regional Manager
Central Region

Attached:

Figure 1 – State Location

Figure 2 – Project Vicinity

Figure 3 – Project Location In Relation to USGS 7.5' Quadrangles

Land Management Plan for the Carrizo Plain Ecological Reserve -- Initial Study
of Environmental Impact

Figure 1 – State Location



Figure 2. CPER and Vicinity

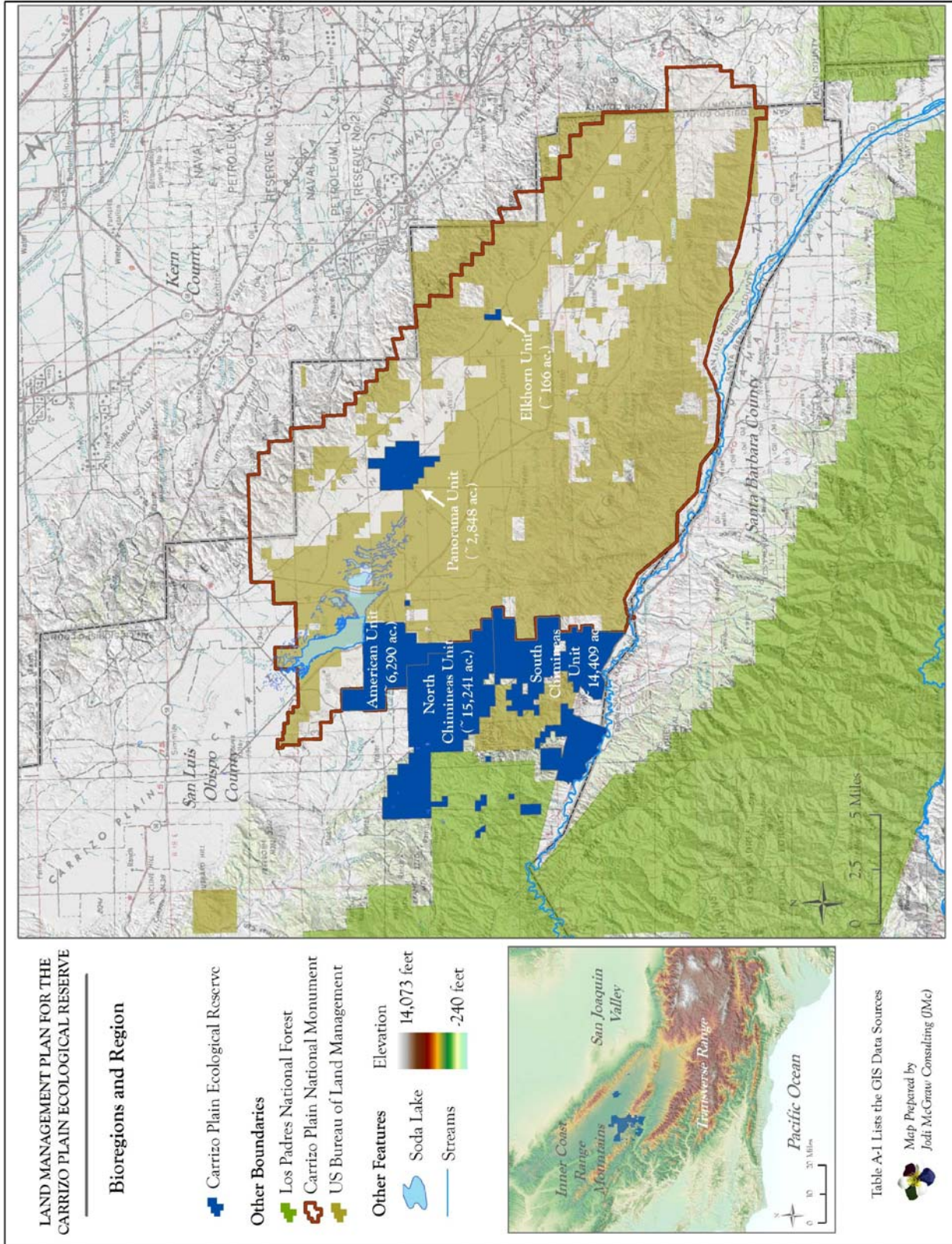


Figure 3 – Management Units of the CPER In Relation To USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangles (Table 1)

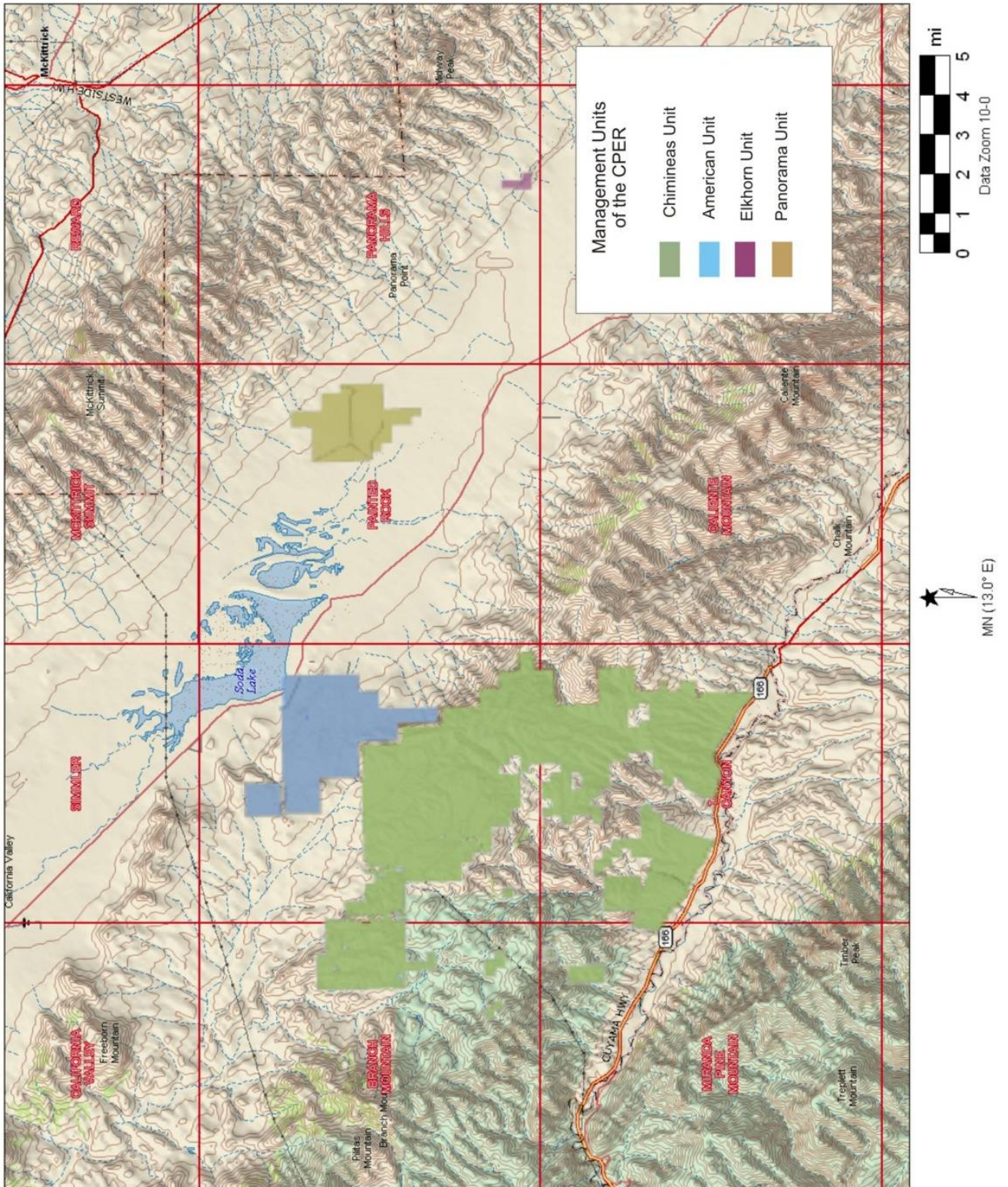


Table 1 -- Location of the CPER With Respect to USGS Quadrangles

Unit	Quadrangle	Base and Meridian	Township	Range	Section(s)
Elkhorn	Panorama Hills	Mount Diablo	32S	22E	20 20, 28, 29, 32 &
Panorama	Panorama Hills	Mount Diablo	31S	21E	33
	Panorama Hills	Mount Diablo	32S	21E	5
	Painted Rock	Mount Diablo	31S	21E	30 & 31
American	Chimineas Ranch	Mount Diablo	31S	19E	16,21-27,35 & 36
	Chimineas Ranch	Mount Diablo	32S	19E	2
	Painted Rock	Mount Diablo	31S	20E	31
Chimineas Units	Branch Mountain	Mount Diablo	31S	18E	22,26,27,34,&35 3,14,15,16,22,&
	Branch Mountain	Mount Diablo	32S	18E	23
	Chimineas Ranch	Mount Diablo	31S	18E	25 & 26
	Chimineas Ranch	Mount Diablo	31S	19E	31-34
	Chimineas Ranch	Mount Diablo	32S	18E	13 2-11,13-18,& 20-
	Chimineas Ranch	Mount Diablo	32S	19E	24
	Miranda Pine Mountain	San Bernardino	12N	30W	25 & 26
	Miranda Pine Mountain	Mount Diablo	32S	18E	27
	Painted Rock	Mount Diablo	32S	20E	19
	Taylor Canyon	San Bernardino	11N	28W	5 & 6
	Taylor Canyon	San Bernardino	11N	29W	1 & 2
	Taylor Canyon	San Bernardino	12N	28W	31 & 32
	Taylor Canyon	San Bernardino	12N	29W	33-36
	Taylor Canyon	Mount Diablo	32S	18E	25 & 36
	Taylor Canyon	Mount Diablo	32S	19E	26-36