

9

**Riverside County
Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan
Interim Management Evaluation and Recommendations**

SITE NAME: GAVILAN1
EDA NAME: BUTCHART

I. SITE PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

1.A. Site Physical Location & Access:

The Gavilan1 site is located within a canyon on the southwestern side of the Gavilan Plateau. It can be reached from Interstate 15 via the Lake Street offramp; proceeding north, following a dirt road used for access to an SBC high-tension powerline which traverses Estelle Mountain. There are two old gates on this dirt road, but these have proven to be subject to rapid vandalism when locked (Baxter, pers. obs.). The dirt road crosses the site, and continues north into the Gold Valley area of the Gavilan Plateau. It is blocked on the north side by private property, and the road has recently washed out about half-way across the subject parcel, preventing most four-wheeled vehicles for proceeding any further northeast. The property can be located at:

Township / Range / Section: NW¼, Section 10, T5S, R5W

UTM Coordinates: 463559E, 3734732N

State Plane Coordinates: 6213771E, 2219807N

1.B. Acreage: 40.00

1.C. Topography:

The rectangular site straddles a canyon, and encompasses both the eastern and western canyon walls as well as the canyon bottom (see attached map). The canyon walls are quite steep, approaching vertical in places. The road has been graded out of the canyon wall on the western side. The canyon bottom at the northern boundary represents the confluence of the main canyon and an additional canyon proceeding northeast.

1.D. Surrounding Land Use:

The site is surrounded by natural open space associated with the Lake Mathews-Estelle Mtn. Reserve on the west and east, and undeveloped private parcels on the north and south. Gold Valley supports low density housing, primarily ranchettes. A high-tension SBC powerline traverses Estelle Mtn. approximately

1300 meters south of the site, which also supports a maintained maintenance road. The dirt road to the site is maintained by SBC only to this powerline, and not beyond.

2. BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

2.A. Plant Communities:

The most striking feature of the site is the relatively dense riparian vegetation found along the canyon bottom. Consisting primarily of mature coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) and western sycamores (*Platanus racemosa*), and scattered Mexican elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*), it is, in places, impenetrable. It is especially thick at the confluence.

The hillsides are covered by a mixture of sage scrub and chaparral species of varying densities. Common species observed include California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*), chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), and chia (*Salvia columbariae*).

It appears as though the site was subject to wildfire approximately 7 years ago. As a result, non-native annual grasses, primarily brome grasses, and mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*) have invaded the site, and now form the background matrix for many of the sage scrub/chaparral areas.

2.B. Likely Animal Species:

Animals likely to inhabit the site are those associated with sage scrub and chaparral habitats. Common species could include the pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*), deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), bobcat (*Felis rufus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), California towhee (*Pipilo fuscus*), speckled towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), Bewick's wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*), wrentit (*Chamaea fasciata*), western screech owl (*Otus kennicottii*), scrub jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*), black phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*), song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*), gopher snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus*), rosy boa (*Lichanura trivirgata*), California whipsnake (*Masticophis lateralis*), southern Pacific rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*), red diamond rattlesnake (*Crotalus ruber*), western fence lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*), western whiptail (*Cnemidophorus tigris*), orange-throated whiptail (*Cnemidophorus hyperythrus*), San Diego horned lizard (*Phrynosoma coronatum*), and the western toad (*Bufo boreas*).

The riparian area is likely to support some species associated just with that area including the raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), opossum (*Didelphis marsupialis*), Nuttall's woodpecker (*Picoides nuttallii*), American and lesser goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*, *C. pasaltria*), Copper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*), California treefrog (*Hyla regilla*), and California black-headed snake (*Tantilla planiceps*).

2.C. Other Habitat or Wildlife Features:

The dense oak riparian corridor of the site provides potential nesting sites for owls and other birds of prey. Rocky outcrops could supply roosting habitat for various bat species.

2.D. Target Species:

Please see Appendix A for a qualitative checklist of MSHCP target animal species, and Appendix B for plant species.

3. IMPACTS AND CURRENT CONDITIONS**3.A. Current Uses:**

There are no organized uses presently occurring on the site. Sporadic uses include target shooting and hunting, and minor OHV use. Most of the OHV use is centered on the road since the canyon walls are generally too steep. Bee hives are found adjacent to the site, down-canyon.

3.B. Fencing & Access Controls:

There currently are no fences or gates to prevent access to the site on the dirt road. Two gates are found further down-canyon, but these are the frequent targets for vandals when repaired or locked.

3.C. Off-Road Vehicle (OHV) Use / Damage:

OHV use is centered along the dirt road. Minor motorcycle use occurs on the hillsides, but for the most part, OHV stay to the road as they move through the site. OHVs typically are used for access for target shooting and hunting at the site.

3.D. Illegal Dumping:

Minor dumping actually occurs on the site itself, however; major trash dumping has occurred further down-canyon from the site. Much of the trash appears associated with target shooting, although a few car bodies are also found there.

3.E. Target Shooting & Hunting:

The entire canyon, including the project site, is used extensively for target shooting and, to a lesser degree, hunting. Numerous target stands have been placed along the canyon walls and creek banks. A high proportion of the illegal dumping is associated with this activity.

3.F. Weed Abatement:

Weed abatement is not an issue on this project site because of a completed lack of structures nearby.

3.G. Other Recreational Opportunities and Constraints:

Potential exists to use the site within the County's regional and community trails plan.

3.H. Special Conditions of Purchase:

None

4. RESTORATION OPPORTUNITIES**4.A. Target Species:**

Opportunities exist for enhancing/restoring the habitat for several sage scrub species, particularly in areas where fire has removed many of the shrubs.

4.B. Multi-Species Aspects:

The presence of at least three inter-digitating communities provides a good amount of ecotonal edge, and should be maintained. Slightly open areas within the riparian area could be created to facilitate animal movement between the east and west hills surrounding the site. Water catchments could be constructed within the watercourse to hold water later into the season for wildlife use. These latter suggestions would require permitting from the CDFG and ACOE.

5. RERSERVE DESIGN AND CONNECTIVITY**5.A. Boundary, Edge and Community Location:**

The site is rectangular in shape with the longer edge being adjacent to other private parcels. The smaller sides are adjacent to the existing Estelle Mountain SKR Reserve. The site, more or less, lies on the outside border of the Gavilan Plateau in an area which represents the only remaining connection between Lake Mathews/Estelle Mtn. reserves and the Steele Peak area.

5.B. Connectivity:

The site is highly important in serving as a component to wildlife movement from the Lake Mathews/Estelle Mtn. reserves, southeast toward Steele Peak, Kabian Park, and, to a lesser degree, the Harford Springs Park area.

5.C. Nearby Existing Reserves:

The site is bordered on the east and west by the Estelle Mtn. SKR Reserve.

5.D. Priority for Future Purchases:

Top priority in this area should be given to acquiring the two adjacent parcels which form the "pocket" of private land extending into the Estelle Mtn. reserve. Priority should be given to the more southern of the two parcels first.

6. INTERIM MANAGEMENT**6.A. Public Issues:**

Each weekend many people enter the canyon from Lake Street or come across Estelle Mtn. on the Edison powerline road. For the most part, people are staying further downstream from the site, and using the road which crosses the site only for access further upstream. The site itself seems to support little human activity, with the exception of sporadic target shooting and OHV use. As a result, it is felt that the best way to interim manage human activity on the site is to not draw attention to it by attempting to keep people out with fences or barriers. We suggest the placement of "low key" signs requesting citizens to respect the natural environment, asking them to stay on the established road, and not to shoot.

The road, which is washed-out, should not be repaired unless CDF feels the need for access is paramount.

6.B. Biological Issues:

The exact nature of the bird population which inhabits the riparian area is of some importance. Does this canyon support breeding of riparian bird species? It is recommended that a low intensity spring bird survey be carried out. Likewise it is recommended that a quick springtime plant survey be completed to search for target plant species.