Least Bell's Vireo Focused Survey Report

Alessandro Project Site
City of Moreno Valley, Riverside County, California

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of focused least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) surveys conducted at the 17.66-acre (2.65-acre offsite) Alessandro project site (Project Site) in the City of Moreno Valley, Riverside County, California. The Project Site is located within the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) planning area. The MSHCP is a regional multi-jurisdictional habitat conservation program that addresses multiple species' habitat needs in western Riverside County. According to MSHCP Section 6.1.2 guidelines, surveys for riparian birds are to be conducted as part of the environmental review process, if suitable habitat is present. Suitable low potential habitat was identified on the Project Site during an initial site reconnaissance conducted in May 21st, 2020 for the least Bell's vireo. Subsequently, focused surveys were conducted during the breeding season in order to comply with MSHCP Section 6.1.2 requirements. The purpose of this report is to document the results of the least Bell's vireo assessment and focused surveys.

1.1 Project Location

The 17.66-acre (2.65-acre offsite) Project Site is located immediately south of Alessandro Boulevard in the City of Moreno Valley (City), Riverside County, California, Assessor Parcel Numbers (APNs) 297-170-002 and 279-170-003 (Figure 1 and Figure 2). Offsite impacts extend into the Alessandro right-of-way to the north and APNs 297-170-088 and 279-170-089 to the south (Figure 2). The Project Site occurs within the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5' series Riverside East Quadrangle, Township 3 South, Range 4 West, Section 12.

The Project Site is located entirely within the MSHCP Reche Canyon/Badlands Area Plan and is not located within an MSHCP Criteria Area, Cell Group, or Linkage Area.

2.0 METHODS AND RESULTS

An initial habitat assessment for potential least Bell's vireo habitat was conducted on May 21st, 2020. As described below, all vegetation communities onsite were mapped and assessed for suitability for least Bell's vireo. A single vegetation community including black willow woodland was characterized as representing low potential habitat for the species. Therefore, focused United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) protocol surveys were initiated. As stated by the USFWS:

> *"Under normal circumstances, all riparian areas and any other potential vireo habitats should be surveyed at least eight (8) times during the period from April 10 to July 31. However, we may concur, on a case by case basis, with a reduced effort if unusual circumstances dictate that this is a prudent course of action. For instance, intensive surveys of small, marginal or extralimital habitats by experienced personnel may well result in defensible conclusions that eight (or more) individual surveys are unnecessary. Under such unusual circumstances, we will consider requests for reductions in the prescribed number of individual surveys. In any case, site visits should be conducted at least 10 days apart to maximize the detection of, for instance, late and early arrivals, females, particularly "non-vocal" birds of both sexes, and nesting pairs.*
>
> *1) Although the period from April 10 to July 31 encompasses the period during which most vireo nesting activity occurs, eight surveys are generally sufficient to detect most*

(if not all) vireo adults in occupied habitats. Precise vireo censuses and estimations of home range likely will not be possible unless surveys are conducted outside of this time window. Although focused surveys conducted in accordance with these guidelines substantially reduce the risk of an unauthorized take that could potentially occur as a result of land development or other projects, individual project proponents may wish to conduct surveys that are more rigorous than those that would otherwise result from strict adherence to these survey guidelines. If additional information (e.g., extent of occupied habitat, total numbers of adult and juvenile vireos in study area) is desired or necessary, surveys should be extended to August 31 and conducted in such a manner as to collect the data necessary to prepare reports that reflect the methods and standards established in the current scientific literature on this subject. In particular, information collected after July 15 will reflect a broader extent to the riparian habitat and other adjacent habitat types that the vireo typically utilizes during the latter phase of the breeding season, especially when the young become independent of the adults.*

2) *Surveys should be conducted by a qualified biologist familiar with the songs, whisper songs, calls, scolds, and plumage characteristics of adult and juvenile vireos. These skills are essential to maximize the probability of detecting vireos and to avoid potentially harassing the species in occupied habitats.*

3) *Surveys should be conducted between dawn and 11:00 a.m. Surveys should not be conducted during periods of excessive or abnormal cold, heat, wind, rain, or other inclement weather that individually or collectively may reduce the likelihood of detection.*

4) *Surveyors should not survey more than 3 linear kilometers or more than 50 hectares of habitat on any given survey day. Although surveyors should generally station themselves in the best possible locations to hear or see vireos, care should be taken not to disturb potential or actual vireo habitats and nests or the habitat of any sensitive or listed riparian species.*

5) *All vireo detections (e.g., vocalization points, areas used for foraging, etc.) should be recorded and subsequently plotted to estimate the location and extent of habitats utilized. These data should be mapped on the appropriate USGS quadrangle map.*

6) *Data pertaining to vireo status and distribution (e.g., numbers and locations of paired or unpaired territorial males, ages and sexes of all birds encountered) should be noted and recorded during each survey. In addition, surveyors should look for leg bands on vireo adults and juveniles if, in fact, it is possible to do so without disturbing or harassing the birds. If leg bands or other markers are observed, then surveyors should record and report the detection and associated circumstances to us by telephone, facsimile, or electronic mail as soon as possible. Reports should include the colors and relative locations of any and all bands detected, the age and sex of the marked bird, and the precise location of the detection.*

7) *The numbers and locations of all brown-headed cowbirds (Molothrus ater) detected within vireo territories should be recorded during each survey and subsequently reported to us. In addition, all detections of the State and federally endangered southwestern willow flycatcher (Empidonax trallii extimus, flycatcher) and State endangered yellow-billed cuckoo (Coccyzus americanus, cuckoo) should be recorded and reported. Any and all cuckoo and flycatcher adults, young, or nests should not be approached, and taped vocalizations of these species should not be used unless authorized in advance by scientific permits to take* issued by us (if appropriate) and the California Department of Fish and Game. Flycatcher presence/absence surveys require a recovery permit issued by us per section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Endangered Species Act."* (USFWS 2001)

A total of eight (8) focused least Bell's vireo surveys were conducted on May 21st, 31st, June 10th, 20th, 30th, July 10th, 20th, and 30th, 2020 by Senior Biologist Jonathan Campbell, PhD and Ruben Ramirez throughout the black willow woodland documented onsite and described below. All surveys were conducted during times and conditions conducive to observing least Bell's vireo (Table 1. Summary of Focused Survey Weather Conditions during the Breeding Season).

Table 1. Summary of Focused Survey Weather Conditions during the Breeding Season

Date	Time Start/End	Temperature (°F)	Wind Speed (mph)	Conditions
5/21/2020	7:30AM – 9:00AM	74	0-5	Clear
5/31/2020	8:00AM – 9:30AM	70	3-5	Clear
6/10/2020	6:00AM – 9:00AM	66	2-8	Clear
6/20/2020	6:00AM – 9:00AM	68	0-4	Clear
6/30/2020	6:00AM – 9:00AM	64	0-4	Clear
7/10/2020	6:00AM – 9:00AM	66	4-8	Clear
7/20/2020	6:00AM – 9:00AM	70	2-8	Clear
7/30/2020	6:00AM – 9:00AM	66	2-8	Clear

The largest area and center of the Project Site is characterized as "disturbed/non-native grassland" and currently offers limited habitat value to plants and wildlife. The Project Site is heavily disturbed and annually disked as part of weed abatement requirements. The Project Site is flat and bordered to the south by industrial buildings, north by high density residential development, and east and west by disturbed lands.

Two (2) drainage features bisect the property in a north to south direction which currently sustains disturbed wetland and riparian vegetation as described below. Natural community names and hierarchical structure follows List of Alliances and Associations (CDFW September 2010) which have been refined and augmented where appropriate to better characterize the habitat types observed onsite when not addressed by the classification system. Scientific nomenclature and common names used for plants in this report follows Hickman (1993). Vertebrate taxonomy follows Stebbins (2003) for amphibians and reptiles, the American Ornithologists' Union (1998 and supplemental) for birds, and Jones et al. (1992) for mammals. The onsite plant communities are as follows (Figure 3, Vegetation Communities Map, Figures 4a/4b, Current Project Site Photographs):

Disturbed/Non-Native Grassland

The majority of the Project Site is characterized as disturbed/non-native grassland and experiences annual dicking activities. Dominant plant species observed within this vegetation community include hairy vetch (*Vicia villosa*), black mustard *(Brassica nigra*), field bindweed *(Convolvulus arvensis*), kochia (*Bassia scoparia*), prickly lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*), jointed charlock (*Raphanus sativus*), Italian rye (*Lolium multiflorum*), horseweed (*Erigeron canadensis*), Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), puncture vine (*Tribulus terrestris*), tumbling pigweed (*Amaranthus albus*), common wild oat (*Avena fatua*), prickly sow thistle (*Sonchus asper*), jimsonweed (*Datura wrightii*), telegraph weed (*Heterotheca grandiflora*), cheeseweed (*Malva parviflora*), ripgut grass (*Bromus diandrus*), foxtail chess (*Bromus madritensis*), mayweed (*Anthemis cotula*), prostrate knotweed (*Polygonum aviculare*), Spanish lotus (*Acmispon americanus*), and western witchgrass (*Panicum capillare*).

Black Willow Woodland

The northern region of Drainage A is dominated by black willow woodland. Common species documented within this vegetation community include Gooding's willow (*Salix gooddingii*), velvet ash (*Fraxinus velutina*), and an understory of non-native grasses and ruderal species as described above.

Developed

Developed regions of the Project Site include a culvert structure located at the southern terminus of Drainage A and existing paved roads located within the offsite impact areas.

Disturbed Wetland – Cattail

Two small patches of disturbed wetland-cattail habitat are located in the northern region of both Drainage A and B, immediately adjacent to Alessandro Boulevard. Dominant plant species observed within this vegetation community include curly dock (Rumex crispus), common cattail (*Typha latifolia*), tall nutsedge (*Cyperus eragrostis*), annual beard grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*), Mexican fan palm (*Washingtonia robusta*), dallis grass (*Paspalum dilatatum*), barnyard grass (*Echinochloa crus-galli*), and tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*).

Ornamental

A single ornamental tree, Mexican palo verde (*Parkinsonia aculeata*) is located adjacent to the black willow woodland.

Mule Fat

A single mule fat (*Baccharis salicifolia*) shrub is located near the northeast corner of the Project Site.

General wildlife species documented onsite or within the vicinity of the Project Site include but are not limited to red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*), house sparrow (Passer domesticus), Nuttall's woodpecker (*Picoides nuttallii*), Cassin's kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*), western kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), black phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*), Say's phoebe (*Sayornis saya*), cliff swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris),* American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) common raven (*Corvus corax*), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), American goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*), house finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*), western tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*), and desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*).

3.0 CONCLUSIONS

No least Bell's vireo were detected onsite during the focused survey efforts conducted during the 2020 breeding season.

4.0 REFERENCES

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FIGURES

Figure 1 Regional Location Map

Alessandro Project Site, City of Moreno Valley, CA

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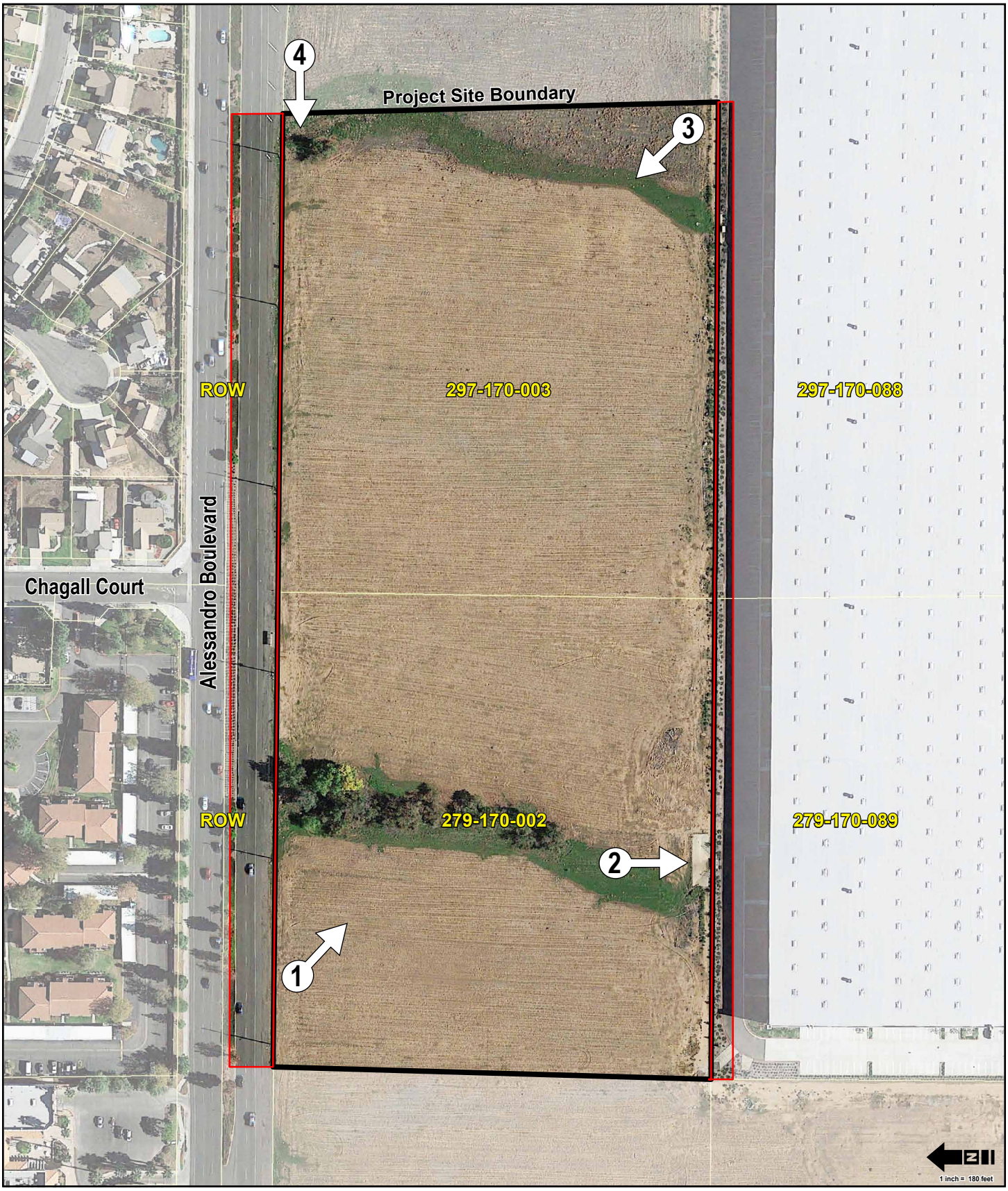

Project Site Boundary (17.66 acres)

Offsite Assessment Area (2.65 acres)

(#) Photo Point & Direction

Figure 2 Project Site Map

Alessandro Project Site, City of Moreno Valley, CA

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BW Black Willow Woodland

DG Disturbed (Non-native Grassland)

DV Developed

OR Ornamental (Mexican palo verde)

DW Disturbed Wetland - Cattail

MF Mule Fat (individual shrub)

Project Site Boundary (17.66 acres)

Offsite Assessment Area (2.65 acres)

Figure 3 Vegetation Communities Map

Alessandro Project Site, City of Moreno Valley, CA

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Photograph 1 - Southeast view of Project Site from northwest corner adjacent to Alessandro Boulevard.

Photograph 2 - Southward view of down drain located at end of the end of Drainage A

Figure 4a Current Project Site Photographs

Alessandro Project Site, City of Moreno Valley, CA

Photograph 3 - Northwest view of Project Site from southeast corner. The Project Site is dominated by annually disked disturbed non-native grassland.

Photograph 4 - Westward view of Drainage B from northeast corner of Project Site near Alessandro Boulevard.

Figure 4b Current Project Site Photographs

Alessandro Project Site, City of Moreno Valley, CA