

SUPPLEMENTAL BIOLOGY REPORT

**PARKSIDE ESTATES PROJECT
HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIFORNIA**

Submitted to:

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared primarily in response to comments and concerns expressed by the California Coastal Commission in its letter of February 21, 2003. However, this report also provides information regarding specific biological and wetland issues raised by the public.

RESPONSES TO COASTAL COMMISSION COMMENTS

The proposed residential development and park are primarily associated with active agricultural use and would not result in any significant impacts to biological resources. Although fragmented patches of hydrophytic plants periodically do occur in and around the agricultural field on site, these plant species, including rabbitfoot grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*), curly dock (*Rumex crispus*), African brass-buttons (*Cotula coronopifolia*), alkali weed (*Cressa truxillensis*), salt sand spurry (*Spergularia marina*), and various umbrella sedges (*Cyperus* spp.), are typical of those ruderal plants associated with many irrigated agricultural fields along the coast. Furthermore, many of these plants associated with the active agricultural field are nonnative and certainly would not provide sufficient habitat to support substantial populations of wildlife, particularly aquatic wildlife.

The proposed natural treatment system will result in the displacement of 0.36 acre of identified wetlands. The dominant plant species include common woody pickleweed (*Salicornia virginica*), five-hooked bassia (*Bassia hyssopifolia*), shrubby sea-blite (*Suaeda moquinii*), and scattered alkali heath (*Frankenia salina*). Some of these wetland plants are ruderal in nature and the existing wetland vegetation is highly degraded due primarily to repeated disturbances in the past. Also, the construction of the East Garden Grove/ Wintersburg Channel decades ago has effectively cut off this remnant patch of coastal salt marsh habitat from tidal flooding. Although impacts to such wetlands would not significantly decrease habitat values based on these current conditions, Shea Homes proposes to salvage the 0.36 acre of wetland vegetation along with the associated topsoil and install it on the earthen berms identified in the proposed natural treatment system plans. In addition, approximately 0.2 acre of disturbed saltgrass and associated topsoil will be salvaged and placed on the earthen berms to preserve any potential habitat for the wandering skipper (*Panoquina errans*). Finally, almost 1.5 acres of open water and brackish/freshwater marsh habitat would be established as part of the proposed natural treatment system. In conclusion, the proposed natural treatment system would provide higher quality wetland habitats than currently exist and would increase the diversity of marsh habitats in the area, which is expected to result in increased wetland wildlife.

Noise, Lighting, Intrusion of Domestic Pets, Human Activity

The Parkside Estates property is currently bounded by residential development on three sides and thus is already subject to all of these impacts. The mesa bluff on the remaining side would limit the effect of new noise and lighting on remaining open space. Human activity is already high on the project site but will likely increase at the proposed park site. Coyotes are still active in the project vicinity and will probably serve as the best deterrent against wandering pets.

Human activity, additional to ongoing farming on the City property, is considerable in undeveloped portions of the Bolsa Chica area. Hikers, dog-walkers, joggers, bicyclists, and paint-ball enthusiasts

are all regular visitors to the Parkside Estates property. Conversion of the property to residential housing and a small park is unlikely to have any noticeable effect on nesting birds, other than providing new nesting opportunities for many species in the resulting residential woodland. Therefore, the proposed development is not expected to contribute any additional impacts with regard to noise, lighting, domestic pets, and/or human activity than already exist.

Raptors

Aggressive trapping of potential predators in the vicinity of nesting colonies of sensitive bird species in the Bolsa Chica lowlands is the most important factor influencing raptor numbers and activity in the Bolsa Chica area, especially during the spring and summer. Recent surveys for the Parkside Estates Project (see Attached, Glenn Lukos Associates, 2003 Raptor Surveys), and ongoing raptor surveys of the Bolsa Chica Mesa area conducted by LSA Associates (LSA), have revealed only limited raptor use of the Parkside Estates parcel. The intensive style of farming practiced on the property generally does not support the prey base needed for these species. Conversion of the parcel to residential housing and a small park is unlikely to have a noticeable effect on raptor activity anywhere in the Bolsa Chica area.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION OF BIOLOGICAL RESOURCE ISSUES

Vernal Pools

There are no vernal pools within the limits of the proposed project. The characteristics typically associated with vernal pools are lacking on site. Some of these characteristics include mima mounds, hardpans composed of basalt or heavy clays, and distinct plant species (e.g., *Psilocarphus* spp., *Downingia* spp., *Eryngium* spp., *Isoetes* spp., *Pogogyne* spp., etc.). However, ponding does occur periodically on site following storm events. This ponding is the result of poorly drained soils made so by the extreme, repeated compaction of the soils due to years of off-road vehicle traffic. Where these compacted soils occur in low-lying areas, surface water accumulates and drains through the soils very slowly. In particular, the ponding that occurs on the dirt road in the former County parcel is the result of road ruts and years of vehicular traffic creating a surface that is so compacted as to be almost impermeable. Vegetation associated with the dirt road depressions is absent for the most part, precluded primarily due to the vehicle traffic on the dirt road; however, with the recent decrease in vehicle traffic on the dirt road, a sparse quantity of annual hydrophytes (e.g., *Cotula coronopifolia*, *Spergularia marina*) have been observed around the edge of the ponded depressions. These do not constitute characteristics that would lead to classification of these depressions as vernal pools. Nevertheless, the area where ponding occurs on the dirt road will not be affected by the proposed development; this area will continue to exist in its current condition.

Fairy Shrimp

To LSA's knowledge, the versatile fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta lindahli*) is the only species of fairy shrimp ever found in the Bolsa Chica area. The species is widespread in coastal Orange County and has no special legal protection. The versatile fairy shrimp has been found on Bolsa Chica Mesa and is likely to occur on site where periodic ponding occurs. The proposed project will not have a significant impact to fairy shrimp that may occur on site.

Wandering Skipper

The wandering skipper (*Panoquina errans*), a California Special Animal, is known to occur in the Bolsa Chica area wherever substantial amounts of saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*) occur. The butterfly is closely associated with saltgrass because the larvae feed on no other plant species. Development of the proposed project will result in the temporary loss of saltgrass, and potentially wandering skippers. However, the saltgrass and associated topsoil will be salvaged and installed on the earthen berms of the proposed natural treatment system. Therefore, potential impacts to the wandering skippers would be temporary, and there would ultimately be an increase in wandering skipper habitat. No long-term impacts to this species are anticipated.

CONCLUSION

The proposed development has been designed to minimize adverse impacts to biological resources on site. In fact, the proposed natural treatment system will actually improve the biological condition on site, as described above.

The proposed development is surrounded by existing residential developments to the north and east, and by the East Garden Grove/Wintersburg Channel to the south. However, the proposed park and natural treatment system create a very effective buffer zone between the proposed development and the adjacent open space of the Bolsa Chica Mesa and the Bolsa Chica Pocket Wetlands to the west. Therefore, the proposed project is not expected to cause any significant adverse impacts to adjacent biological resources.