

# **GENERAL BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES ASSESSMENT**

**YUCCA VALLEY, SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**  
(Township 1 South, Range 5 East, Section 3)

*Prepared for:*

**Yonnus Becker  
1501 Main Street  
Venice Beach, California 90291**

*Prepared by:*

**RCA Associates, Inc.  
15555 Main Street, #D4-235  
Hesperia, California 92345  
(760)596-0017**

**Principal Investigators:**

**Randall Arnold, President and Principal Biologist**



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**Prepared for:** Yonnus Becker

**Principal Investigators:** Randall C. Arnold, Jr., Principal Biologist

**Contact Information:**  
Randall Arnold  
RCA Associates, Inc.  
15555 Main Street, #D4-235  
Hesperia, CA 92345  
(760) 596-0017  
[rarnold@rcaassociatesllc.com](mailto:rarnold@rcaassociatesllc.com)

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Following the data review, surveys were performed on the site during which the biological resources on the property and in the surrounding areas were documented by biologists from RCA Associates, Inc. As part of the surveys, the property site and the adjoining lands were evaluated for the presence of native habitats which could potentially support populations of sensitive wildlife species. Focused surveys were also conducted for the burrowing owl and desert tortoise. The property was also evaluated for the presence of Joshua trees, sensitive habitats including wetlands, vernal pools, riparian habitats, and jurisdictional areas. The results of this report also include information on any Joshua trees present on the property.

Based on data from USFWS, CDFW, and a search of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB, 2019), there are several special status species which have been documented in the area surrounding the site. These include three mammals, three birds, four reptiles, four plants, and one invertebrate species (See Section 4.0, Table 4-1). Scientific nomenclature for this report is based on the following references: Hickman (1993), Munz (1974), Stebbins (2003), Sibley (2000) and Whitaker (1980).

### **1.1 Property Description**

General biological surveys were conducted on August 13, 2019 on the parcel (0.16-acres [approximate]) located south of Santa Fe Trail and Cherokee Trail the City of Yucca Valley, California (Township 1 South, Range 5 East, Section 3, USGS Yucca Valley South, California Quadrangle, 1956) (Appendix A: Figures 1, 2, and 3). As part of the environmental process, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) data sources were reviewed.

The site is bordered on the north, south and west by existing multi-family dwellings, office buildings, and commercial businesses. The parcel directly east of the site is currently being developed and a vacant lot borders the site on its southern boundary. The property has been significantly disturbed by various human activities including dumping of debris and there are several foot paths which cross the site. The project site currently supports a disturbed creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) community.

## 2.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS

The property is approximately 0.16-acres in size and is located south of Santa Fe Trail and west of Cherokee Trail in the City of Yucca Valley, California (Township 1 South, Range 5 East, Section 3, USGS Yucca Valley South, California Quadrangle 1956) (Appendix A: Figures 1 and 2).

The project site supports a relatively sparse density of vegetation with creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), saltbush (*Atriplex sp.*), ephedra (*Ephedra nevadensis*), lycium (*Lycium cooperi*), cholla (*Opuntia sp.*), and erodium (*Erodium texanum*) common on the site (Figure 3). Four Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) were also present on the site. The Joshua trees which are present on the site are discussed in detail below in section 5.5. Table 1 provides a list of all plants occurring on the site and in the immediate surrounding area (Appendix A).

The site is expected to support only a few wildlife species given the small size and the presence of the parcel in a developed area of the City. One only cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus auduboni*) was observed; although other species which may inhabit the site include California ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*), Merriam's kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys auduboni*), and antelope ground squirrel (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*).

Birds observed included ravens (*Corvus corax*), house finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), and mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*). No reptiles were observed during the August 13, 2019 surveys. However, species which are common in the area and which may inhabit the site include desert spiny lizard (*Sceloporus magister*), side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), and western whiptail lizard (*Cnemidophorus tigris*). Table 2 provides a compendium of wildlife species (Appendix A).

No sensitive habitats (e.g., wetlands, vernal pools, critical habitats for sensitive species, etc.) were observed on the site during the field investigations.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGIES

General biological surveys were conducted on August 13, 2019 during which biologists from RCA Associates, Inc. initially walked meandering transects throughout the site to collect data on the plant and wildlife communities. Following completion of the initial reconnaissance survey, comprehensive surveys were performed throughout the site to document the vegetation present on the property and the wildlife species which inhabit the area. In addition to the general biological investigations, focused surveys were conducted for the burrowing owl and desert tortoise. The results of this report also include information on Joshua trees present on the property. The applicable methodologies for the various field investigations performed are summarized below.

Surveys were performed on the site and in the surrounding area from about 0700 to 0900 hours on August 13, 2019. Joshua tree surveys were also performed to evaluate the presence of the species on the property and the results of the Joshua tree survey are detailed below in section 5.5. Weather conditions during the surveys consisted of winds 0 to 5 mph, temperatures from 75 (°F) to 85 (°F) with cloud cover ranging from 0 to 5 percent. All plants and wildlife detected during the field investigations were recorded and are provided in Tables 1 & 2 along with other species that have been documented in the area (Appendix A).

**General Plant and Animal Surveys:** Meandering transects were walked throughout the site and in the surrounding area (i.e., zone of influence) at a pace that allowed for careful documentation of the plant and animal species present on the site. All plants observed were identified in the field and wildlife was identified through visual observations and/or by vocalizations. Tables 1 and 2 (Appendix A) provides a comprehensive compendium of the various plant and animal species observed during the field investigations.

**Desert Tortoise:** A habitat assessment was conducted on the site for the desert tortoises and a focused survey was also performed for the presence of any potential tortoise burrows by biologists from RCA Associates, Inc. Ten-meter, parallel belt transects were walked in a north-south direction until the entire property had been checked for any tortoise sign (burrows, tracks, scats, etc.). Surveys in the zone of influence (ZOI) were only conducted in the vacant lot to the south since the site is bordered on the north, east and west by existing or on-going developments. During the various biological survey, all transects were walked at a pace that allowed careful observations along the transect routes and in the immediate vicinity. Field notes were recorded regarding native

plant assemblages, wildlife sign, and human effects in order to determine the presence or absence of suitable tortoise foraging habitat. If tortoises are found to inhabit the site in the future, a Section 10(a)(1)(b) incidental take permit from the USFWS and a Section 2081 permit from CDFW will be required to mitigate for impacts to the species.

**Burrowing Owl:** A habitat assessment and focused survey was conducted for the burrowing owl in conjunction with the general biological surveys to determine if the site supports suitable habitat for the species and any owl sign. As part of the focused survey, transects were walked throughout the site during which any suitable burrows were evaluated for owls and owl sign. Burrowing owls typically utilize burrows which have been excavated by other animals (squirrels, coyotes, foxes, dogs, etc.) since owls rarely dig their own burrows. CDFW protocol also requires surveys be conducted in the surrounding area out to a distance of about 500 feet; however, zone of influence (ZOI) surveys were limited to the south. If owls are present on a site, CDFW typically requires the owls to be passively relocated during the non-breeding season.

#### **4.0 LITERATURE SEARCH**

As part of the environmental process, a search of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB, 2019) was performed. Based on this review, it was determined there are fifteen special status species in the area including three mammals, three birds, four reptiles, four plants and one insect which have been documented within about five miles of the site. The following table provides data on each special status species which has been documented in the area. The following Table provides a list of the various special status species which have been documented within approximately 5-miles of the site.





**TABLE 4-1**  
**Summary Table Report**  
 California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
 California Natural Diversity Database



Query Criteria: Quad<span style='color:Red'> IS </span>(Yucca Valley South (3411614))

Name (Scientific/Common)	CNDDB Ranks	Listing Status (Fed/State)	Other Lists	Elev. Range (ft.)	Total EO's	Element Occ. Ranks						Population Status		Presence		
						A	B	C	D	X	U	Historic > 20 yr	Recent <= 20 yr	Extant	Poss. Extirp.	Extirp.
<i>Anniella stebbinsi</i> southern California legless lizard	G3 S3	None None	CDFW_SSC-Species of Special Concern USFS_S-Sensitive	4,007 4,007	417 S:1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
<i>Astragalus tricarinatus</i> triple-ribbed milk-vetch	G2 S2	Endangered None	Rare Plant Rank - 1B.2 SB_RSABG-Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden	2,748 2,748	43 S:1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
<i>Chaetodipus fallax pallidus</i> pallid San Diego pocket mouse	G5T34 S3S4	None None	CDFW_SSC-Species of Special Concern	3,300 4,520	79 S:3	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	3	0	0
<i>Crotalus ruber</i> red-diamond rattlesnake	G4 S3	None None	CDFW_SSC-Species of Special Concern USFS_S-Sensitive	4,200 4,200	192 S:1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
<i>Erigeron parishii</i> Parish's daisy	G2 S2	Threatened None	Rare Plant Rank - 1B.1 SB_RSABG-Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden	3,450 4,645	50 S:3	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	3	0	0
<i>Gopherus agassizii</i> desert tortoise	G3 S2S3	Threatened Threatened	IUCN_VU-Vulnerable	2,875 2,875	968 S:1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
<i>Lasiurus xanthinus</i> western yellow bat	G5 S3	None None	CDFW_SSC-Species of Special Concern IUCN_LC-Least Concern WBWG_H-High Priority	3,350 3,350	58 S:1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
<i>Linanthus maculatus ssp. maculatus</i> Little San Bernardino Mtns. linanthus	G2T2 S2	None None	Rare Plant Rank - 1B.2 BLM_S-Sensitive SB_RSABG-Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden	4,000 4,000	53 S:1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
<i>Ovis canadensis nelsoni</i> desert bighorn sheep	G4T4 S3	None None	BLM_S-Sensitive CDFW_FP-Fully Protected USFS_S-Sensitive		46 S:1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
<i>Paranomada californica</i> California cuckoo bee	G1 S1	None None		3,350 3,350	2 S:1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0



## Summary Table Report

California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
California Natural Diversity Database



Name (Scientific/Common)	CNDDB Ranks	Listing Status (Fed/State)	Other Lists	Elev. Range (ft.)	Total EO's	Element Occ. Ranks						Population Status		Presence		
						A	B	C	D	X	U	Historic > 20 yr	Recent <= 20 yr	Extant	Poss. Extirp.	Extirp.
<i>Phrynosoma blainvillii</i> coast horned lizard	G3G4 S3S4	None None	BLM_S-Sensitive CDFW_SSC-Species of Special Concern IUCN_LC-Least Concern	3,460 4,520	780 S:2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	2	0	0
<i>Saltugilia latimeri</i> Latimer's woodland-gilia	G3 S3	None None	Rare Plant Rank - 1B.2 BLM_S-Sensitive SB_RSABG-Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden SB_USDA-US Dept of Agriculture USFS_S-Sensitive	2,748 4,285	60 S:4	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4	4	0	0
<i>Setophaga petechia</i> yellow warbler	G5 S3S4	None None	CDFW_SSC-Species of Special Concern USFWS_BCC-Birds of Conservation Concern	4,500 4,500	73 S:1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
<i>Toxostoma lecontei</i> Le Conte's thrasher	G4 S3	None None	CDFW_SSC-Species of Special Concern IUCN_LC-Least Concern NABCI_RWL-Red Watch List USFWS_BCC-Birds of Conservation Concern	3,309 3,309	238 S:1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
<i>Vireo bellii pusillus</i> least Bell's vireo	G5T2 S2	Endangered Endangered	IUCN_NT-Near Threatened NABCI_YWL-Yellow Watch List	3,200 3,200	501 S:1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0

## 5.0 RESULTS

### 5.1 General Biological Resources

The site supports a disturbed creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) community which covers most of the property. Species present on the site included creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*), saltbush (*Atriplex sp.*), ephedra (*Ephedra nevadensis*), lyceum (*Lycium cooperi*), and erodium (*Erodium texanum*) (Figure 3). Table 1 provides a compendium of all plants occurring on the site and/or in the immediate surrounding area (Appendix A).

Wildlife species typically found in association with creosote bush, and which were either observed on the site and/or are common in the region included desert cottontails (*Sylvilagus auduboni*), California ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*), Merriam's kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys auduboni*), and antelope ground squirrel (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*). Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) may also occur in the general area. Birds observed included ravens (*Corvus corax*), house finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), and mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*).

Reptiles that are common in the region which are expected to inhabit the site include desert spiny lizard (*Sceloporus magister*), side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), and western whiptail lizard (*Cnemidophorus tigris*). Table 2 provides a compendium of wildlife species observed during the various surveys and those likely to occur in the area (Appendix B).

No sensitive habitats (e.g., wetlands, vernal pools, critical habitats for sensitive species, etc.) were observed on the site during the field investigations.

### 5.2 Federal and State Listed Species

**Desert Tortoise:** Desert tortoises have been documented in the area general region; however, the site does not support the species given the results of the focused survey conducted on August 13, 2019 during which no burrows, scats, or other tortoise sign were observed. Furthermore, nor are any tortoises expected to occur on the site in the future. The site is surrounded by existing or on-going developments but is also located in a developed area of the City.

**Least Bell's Vireo:** Least Bell's vireo have been documented in the region; however, this species is limited to riparian habitats along streams and/or rivers. No riparian habitat occurs on the site; therefore, the species is not expected to occur on the site.

**Triple-ribbed Milk-vetch:** This plant species occurs on gravelly soils in undisturbed Joshua tree woodlands and desert scrub communities. Given the past disturbed which has occurred on the site and the small size of the property, this plant species is not expected to occur on the site.

**Parish's Daisy:** This plant species is found in the Mojave Desert typically in undisturbed Joshua tree woodlands. This species is not expected to occur on the site given the level of disturbance which has occurred and the small size of the property.

### **5.3 Wildlife Species of Special Concern and Special Status Plants**

As noted in Table 4-1 (Section 4.0) there are several special status species which occur in the region; however, given the absence of suitable habitat for these various species, and the existing disturbed conditions none of the species are expected to occur on the site. The only species which could potentially be present is the burrowing owl.

**Burrowing Owl:** Owl colonies that have been observed in the region; however, the focused survey for owls conducted on August 13, 2019 did not detect any burrowing owls, owl burrows, or any signs of the species (e.g., casting, whitewash, etc.). Therefore, the site is not expected to support any burrowing owls at the present time, nor is the species expected to be present in the near future.

### **5.4 Jurisdictional Waters and Riparian Habitat**

No riparian vegetation or habitat (e.g., cottonwoods, willows, etc.) exist on the site or in the adjacent habitats.

### **5.5 Protected Plants**

The only protected plant which was observed on the site were four (4) Joshua trees which are located in the eastern portion of the site. After evaluation of each tree, it was determined that only

two of the Joshua trees are suitable for transplanting based on size, health, and condition (i.e., clonal). Joshua tree # 4 is relatively large with multiple branches and there is a very low probability it could be successfully transplanted. Joshua tree # 5 is a clonal tree (i.e., multiple roots systems) and is not good candidate for transplanting. The following Table provides information on each of the Joshua trees. Joshua trees #2 and #3 are good candidates for transplanting and should be utilized for on-site landscaping, if possible. All transplanting activities should be conducted by a qualified arborist or biologist.

**Table 5.5-1: Joshua trees present on the site,**

<b>FLAG #</b>	<b>SIZE (FT)</b>	<b>LATITUDE</b>	<b>LONGITUDE</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
2	14	N34 07.106'	W116 26.664'	Transplantable
3	10	N34 07.104.	W116 26.657'	Transplantable
4	20	N34 07.107.	W116 26.648'	Discard due to size and multiple branches.
5	13	N34 07.116'	W116 26.655'	Discard due to clonal root system.

## **6.0 Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

### **6.1 General Biological Resources**

Future development of the site will impact the general biological resources present on the site, and most of the vegetation will likely be removed during future construction activities. Most, if not all of the Joshua trees, will be directly impacted by the proposed project. As stated above, only two of the four trees are suitable for transplanting and should be utilized for on-site landscaping if possible. A few wildlife species will be impacted by development activities and those species with limited mobility (i.e., small mammals and reptiles) will experience increases in mortality during the construction phase. However, more mobile species (i.e., birds, large mammals) will be displaced into adjacent areas and will likely experience minimal impacts. Therefore, loss of about 0.16-acres of desert vegetation is not expected to have a significant cumulative impact on the overall biological resources in the region given the presence of similar habitat throughout the surrounding desert region.

### **6.2 Federal and State Listed and Species of Special Concern**

No Federal or State-listed species were observed on the site during the field investigations including the desert tortoise, triple-ribbed milk-vetch, or Parish's daisy. In addition, there are no documented observations of these species either on the site or in the immediate area. The site is not expected to support populations of the desert tortoise or any other State or federal listed species based on the results of the August 13, 2019 surveys. No burrowing owls or owl sign were observed on the project site; however, a 30-day pre-construction survey will be required by CDFW and the City prior to ground disturbance to ensure no owls are present on the site.

## **7.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The proposed project is not expected to have an impact on any special status species or special status habitats based on the August 13, 2019 surveys. Furthermore, loss of about 0.16-acres of disturbed creosote bush habitat is not expected to be a significant cumulative impact given the presence of this community throughout the Mojave Desert. In addition, loss of this habitat is not expected to have a significant impact on wildlife which may inhabit the site or on those species which may infrequently traverse the site. If any special status wildlife species are observed on the property in the future, CDFW and USFWS (as applicable) should be contacted to discuss specific mitigation measures which may be required for the individual species. CDFW and USFWS are the only agencies which can grant authorization for the “take” of any sensitive species.

As noted above in Section 5.5, four (4) Joshua trees are present on the project site and will be impacted by the proposed development activities. Of the four (4) Joshua trees present on the site, only two are suitable for transplanting based on their condition, health, and size (Table 5.5-1).

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## CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the statements furnished above and in the attached exhibits, present the data and information required for this biological evaluation and that the facts, statements, and information presented are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. Fieldwork conducted for this assessment was performed by me or other biologists under my direct supervision. I certify that I have not signed a non-disclosure or consultant confidentiality agreement with the project applicant or applicant's representative and that I have no financial interest in the project.

Date: 8-14-2019 Report Author Randall Arnold

Field Work Performed by: Randall Arnold, Principal Biologist

**Appendix A**  
**Tables and Figures**

**Table 1 - Plants observed on the site and known to occur in the immediate surrounding area.**

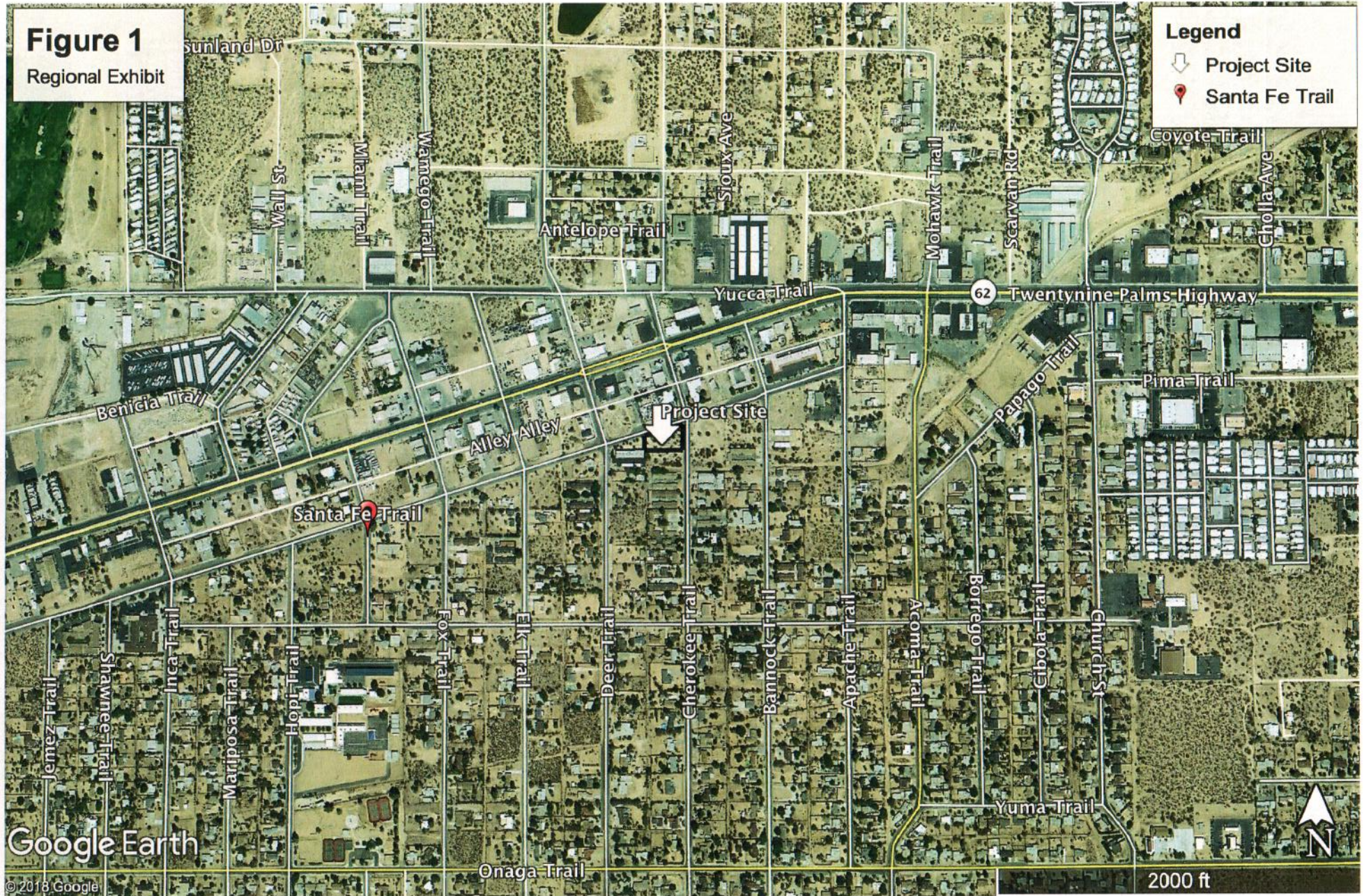
<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
Joshua tree	<i>Yucca brevifolia</i>	On site
Creosote bush	<i>Larrea tridentate</i>	“
Brome grass	<i>Bromus sp.</i>	“
Sage	<i>Salvia carduacea</i>	Surrounding area
Schismus	<i>Schismus barbatus</i>	“
Saltbush	<i>Atriplex sp.</i>	On-site
Paperbag plant	<i>Salazaria mexicana</i>	Surrounding area
Ephedra	<i>Ephedra nevadensis</i>	On-site
Yellow-green matchweed	<i>Gutierrezia sarothrae</i>	Surrounding area
Lycium	<i>Lycium cooperi</i>	On-site
Buckwheat	<i>Eriogonum fasciculatum</i>	Surrounding area
Anderson's thornbush	<i>Lycium andersonii</i>	“
Burrobush	<i>Ambrosia dumosa</i>	“
Cholla	<i>Opuntia sp.</i>	On-site

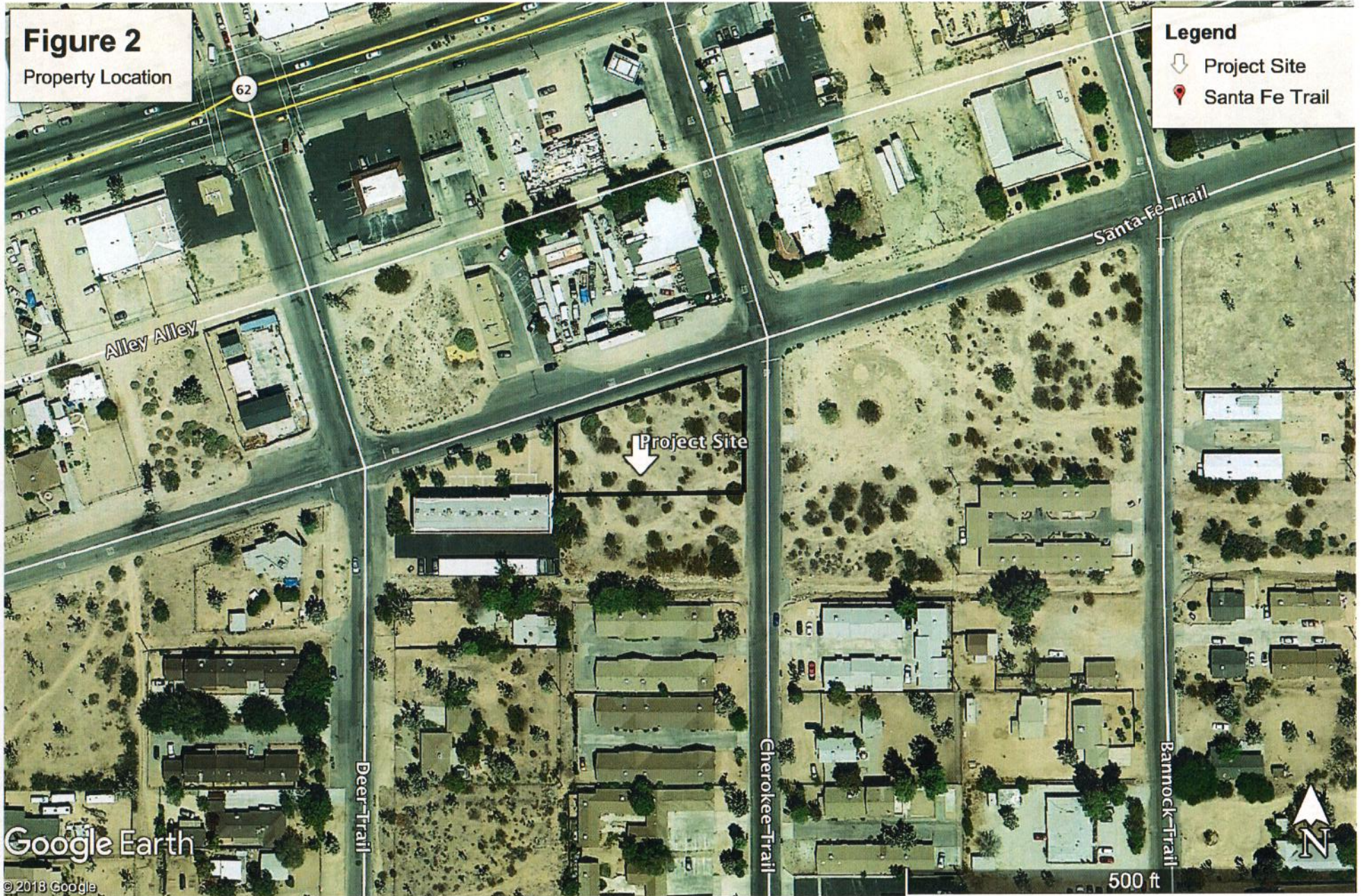
Note: The above list is not intended to be a comprehensive list of every plant which may occur on the site or in the zone of influence.

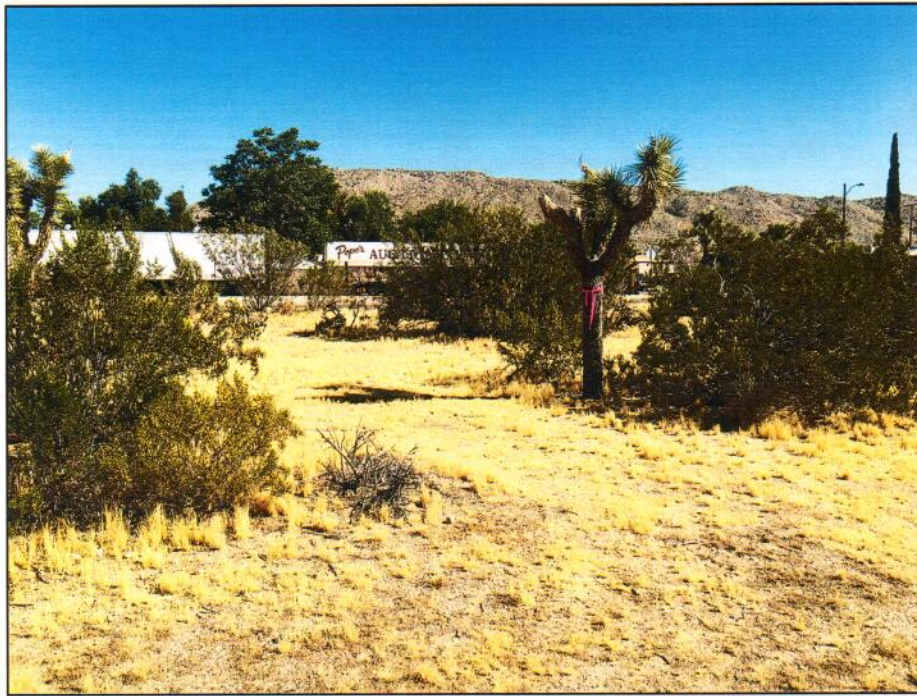
**Table 2 - Wildlife observed on the site during the field investigations and those species which have been previously observed in the area.**

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
Common raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	On-site and in the surrounding area.
California ground squirrel	<i>Spermophilus beecheyi</i>	Surrounding area
Sage sparrow	<i>Amphispiza belli</i>	“
Song sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	“
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	“
House finch	<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>	“
Northern mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottus</i>	“
Mourning dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	On-site
Cactus wren	<i>Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus</i>	Surrounding area
Gambel’s quail	<i>Callipepla californicus</i>	“
Horned lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	“
Turkey vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	“
Western flycatcher	<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	“
Western whiptail lizard	<i>Cnemidophorus tigris</i>	“
Side-blotched lizard	<i>Uta stansburiana</i>	“
Desert spiny lizard	<i>Sceloporus magister</i>	“
Antelope ground squirrel	<i>Ammospermophilus leucurus</i>	“
Desert cottontail	<i>Sylvilagus auduboni</i>	On-site
Jackrabbit	<i>Lepus Californicus</i>	Surrounding area
Coyotes	<i>Canis latrans</i>	“

Note: The above Table is not a comprehensive list of every wildlife species which may occur in the area but those which were observed on the site or in the immediate area during previous surveys.







CENTER OF SITE LOOKING NORTH



CENTER OF SITE LOOKING SOUTH

FIGURE 3  
PHOTOGRAPHS OF SITE