



Memorandum

Date: July 23, 2024
To: Heidi Schweglar
From: Juan J. Hernandez, Hernandez Environmental Services
Subject: Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment for APN 059-708-121

This memorandum provides the methods and results of a California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) protocol burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) (BUOW) survey for Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 059-708-121 located within the Town of Yucca Valley, San Bernardino County, California.

Project Location

The approximate 2.53-acre property is located at the address 56885 Sunflower Drive Yucca Valley, CA 92284. The project site is located northeast of the intersection of Old Woman Springs Road and Sun Mesa Drive. Specifically, the project site is located within section 14, township 1 north, range 5 east in the *Yucca Valley North* United States Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5' topographic quadrangle. The center point latitude and longitude for the project site are 34° 10' 09.3872" North, 116° 25' 22.8727" West (Figures 1 and 2).

Project Description

The proposed project includes the development of a 1,200 square foot single story artist studio addition to an existing residential and storage building. Other improvements include a new 600 SF attached shade cover, accessible path of travel improvements, a paved parking area, and compacted native surfacing parking area. All project activities will occur within the northwest corner of the site.

Literature Review

Prior to the site visit, HES biologist referred to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) California Native Diversity Database (CNDDDB) and Biogeographic Information and Observation System (BIOS) for burrowing owl occurrence information. No burrowing owl occurrences recorded on CNDDDB are within five miles of the site.

Field Survey Methods

On July 18, 2024, HES biologist performed a habitat assessment of the approximately 2.53-acre project site following the guidelines of Appendix B and C of the *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (2012). The July 18, 2024, burrowing owl habitat assessment survey began at 8:20 A.M. and ended at 9:00 A.M. Weather conditions were sunny, and the temperature ranged from 86 to 87 degrees Fahrenheit. Winds ranged from three to ten miles per hour from the southeast. The habitat assessment survey was conducted during the time of day and weather that is conducive to observing owls outside their burrows. The survey was conducted between morning civil twilight and 10:00 AM and not conducted during rain, high winds (> 12 miles per hour), dense fog, or temperatures above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. No raptors or other predators that may suppress burrowing owl activity were present during the survey. Transects spaced approximately 7 m to 20 m apart, were walked across the site to allow 100 percent visual coverage of the ground surface. The areas within the 500-foot buffer around the site were visually inspected using binoculars as there were signs against trespassing.

During the survey the focus was to find any burrows or burrow surrogates suitable of supporting burrowing owl. Any burrow or structure entrances would be checked for the presence of BUOW, molted feathers, cast pellets, prey remains, eggshell fragments, tracks, or excrement. Natural or man-made structures and debris piles that could support BUOW were also surveyed. The locations of all suitable BUOW habitat, potential burrows, BUOW sign, and any BUOW observed would be recorded and mapped with a handheld Global Positioning System (GPS) unit.

All wildlife species encountered visually or audibly during the field survey were identified and recorded in field notes. Binoculars were used to aid in the identification of observed wildlife. Representative site photographs were taken and are included within Appendix A.

Results

The *Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation* (2012) defines burrowing owl habitat as areas that generally have “short or sparse vegetation (at least at some time of year), presence of burrows, burrow surrogates or presence of fossorial mammal dens, well-drained soils, and abundant and available prey.”

The 2.53-acre project site consists of a maintained residential property. There are two existing structures, located near the center of the western portion of the site. The vegetation on site is sparse and scattered mostly along the borders of the site. Plant species observed on site include Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*), pine tree (*Pinus* sp.), saltbush (*Atriplex* sp.), and shortpod mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*). The herbaceous layer on site is sparse and appears to be regularly maintained. The site is flat with elevations ranging from 3,738 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) and 3,745 feet AMSL. The soil on site appeared to be compact with a thin layer of loose sandy soil

on top. The site is bordered by a rural residential development to the north, vacant land to the east, a commercial development to the south, and Old Woman Springs Rd to the west.

No suitable habitat or burrows/nesting opportunities for burrowing owl were found on site. No ground squirrels (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*) or ground squirrel burrows were observed on site or within the 500-foot buffer. No structures that could act as suitable burrow surrogates were found on site during the survey. Burrowing owl signs such as molted feathers, cast pellets, or excrement were not found. No burrowing owl were observed on the project site.

Conclusions

Based on the absence of BUOW and BUOW evidence (i.e., scat, pellets, and feathers) within the study area, it can be concluded that the project site is not currently occupied by burrowing owl. The habitat assessment survey of the 2.53-acre project site conducted on July 18, 2024, found that the maintained residential property does not provide suitable habitat for burrowing owl on site due to a lack of suitable burrows/nesting opportunities for burrowing owl. The site also has large trees that can support raptors which prey on burrowing owls.

Certification

I hereby certify that the statements furnished above and in the attached exhibits present 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.

Date: July 23, 2024



Juan J. Hernandez
Principal Biologist

Enclosures:

- Figure 1: Location Map
- Figure 2: Vicinity Map
- Figure 3: Project Plans
- Figure 4: Survey Area Map
- Appendix A: Site Photographs

FIGURES

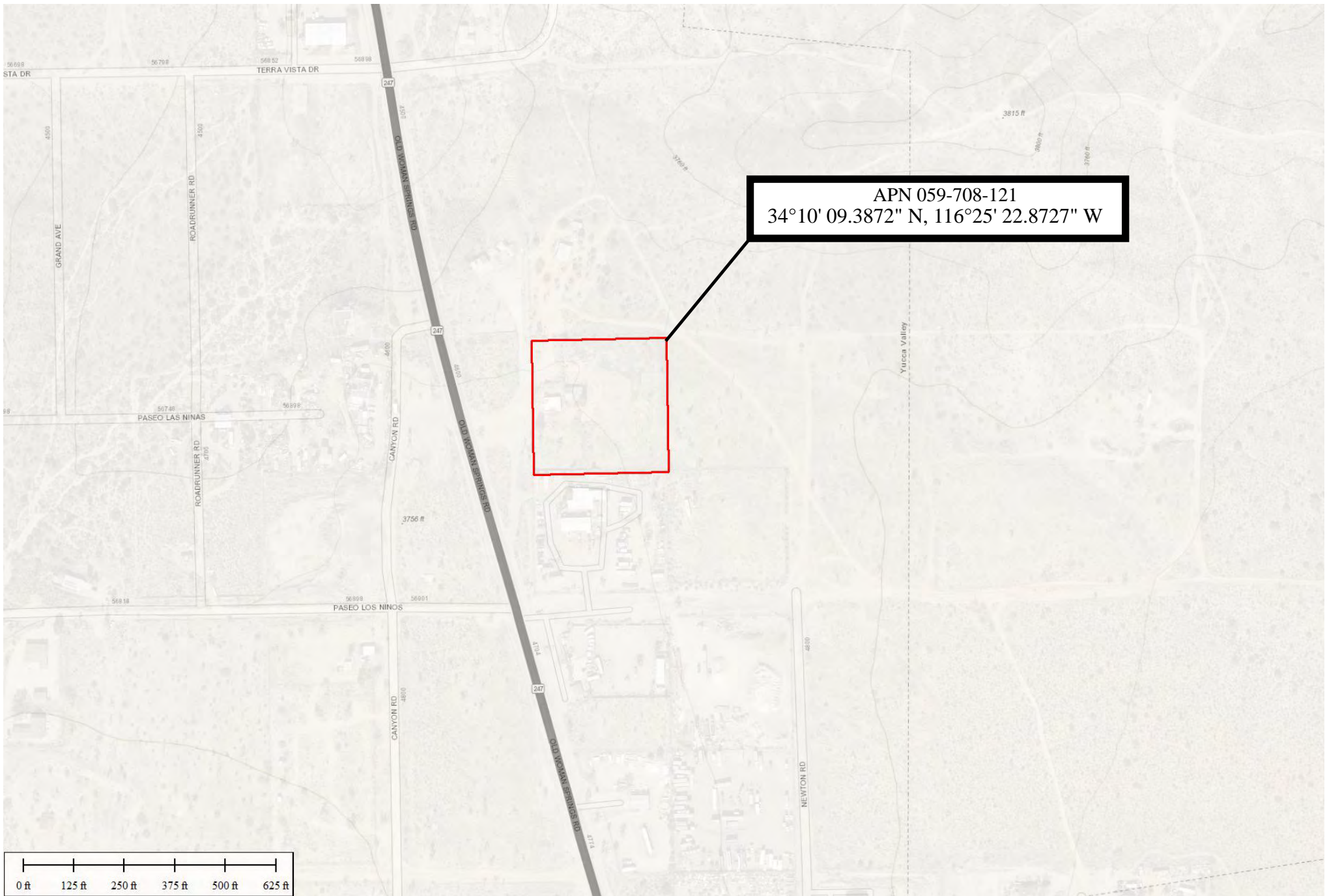


Figure 1
 Location Map
 APN 059-708-121
 Town of Yucca Valley
 San Bernardino County, California

Legend

 Property Boundary



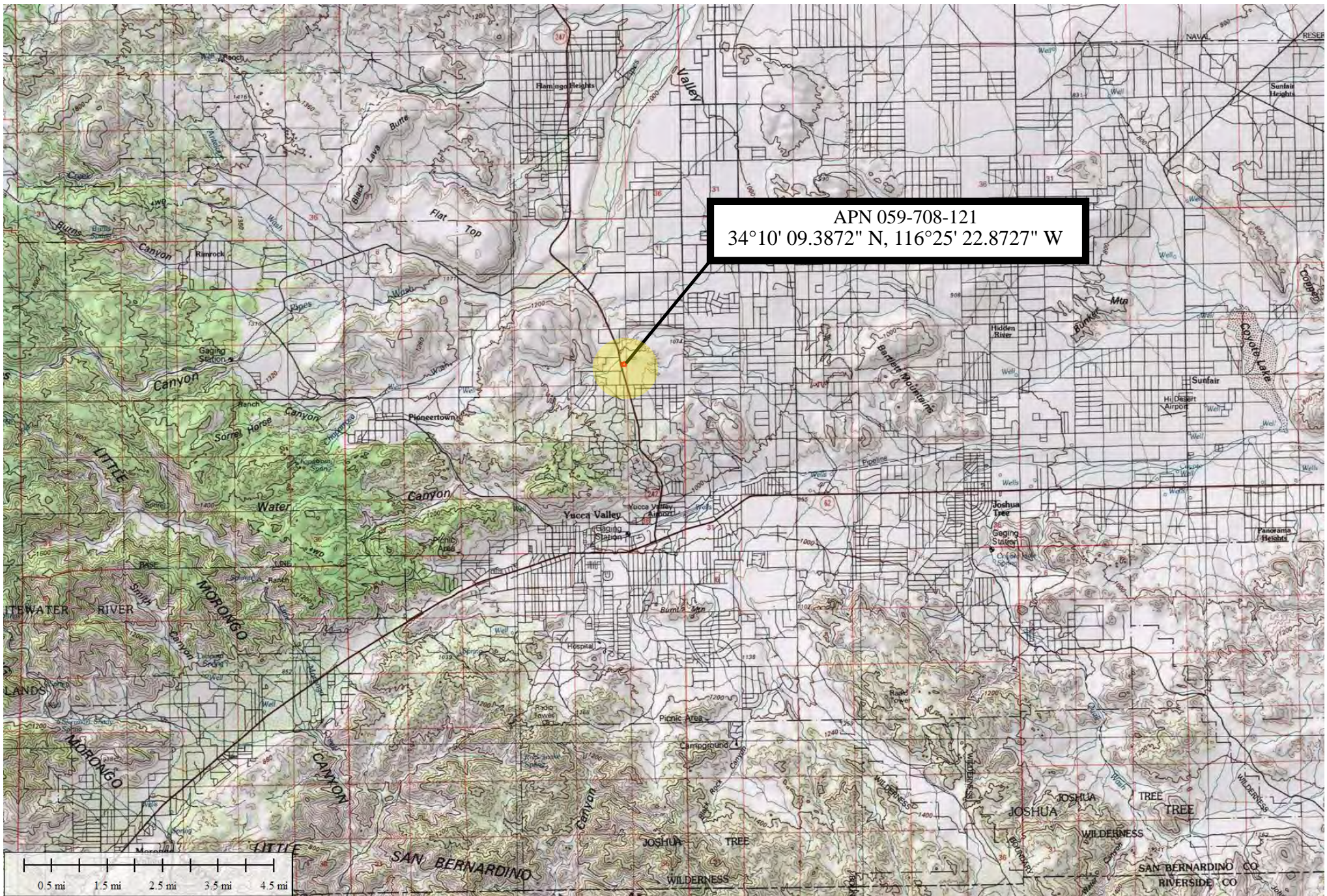


Figure 2
Vicinity Map
APN 059-708-121
Town of Yucca Valley
San Bernardino County, California

Legend

 Property Boundary



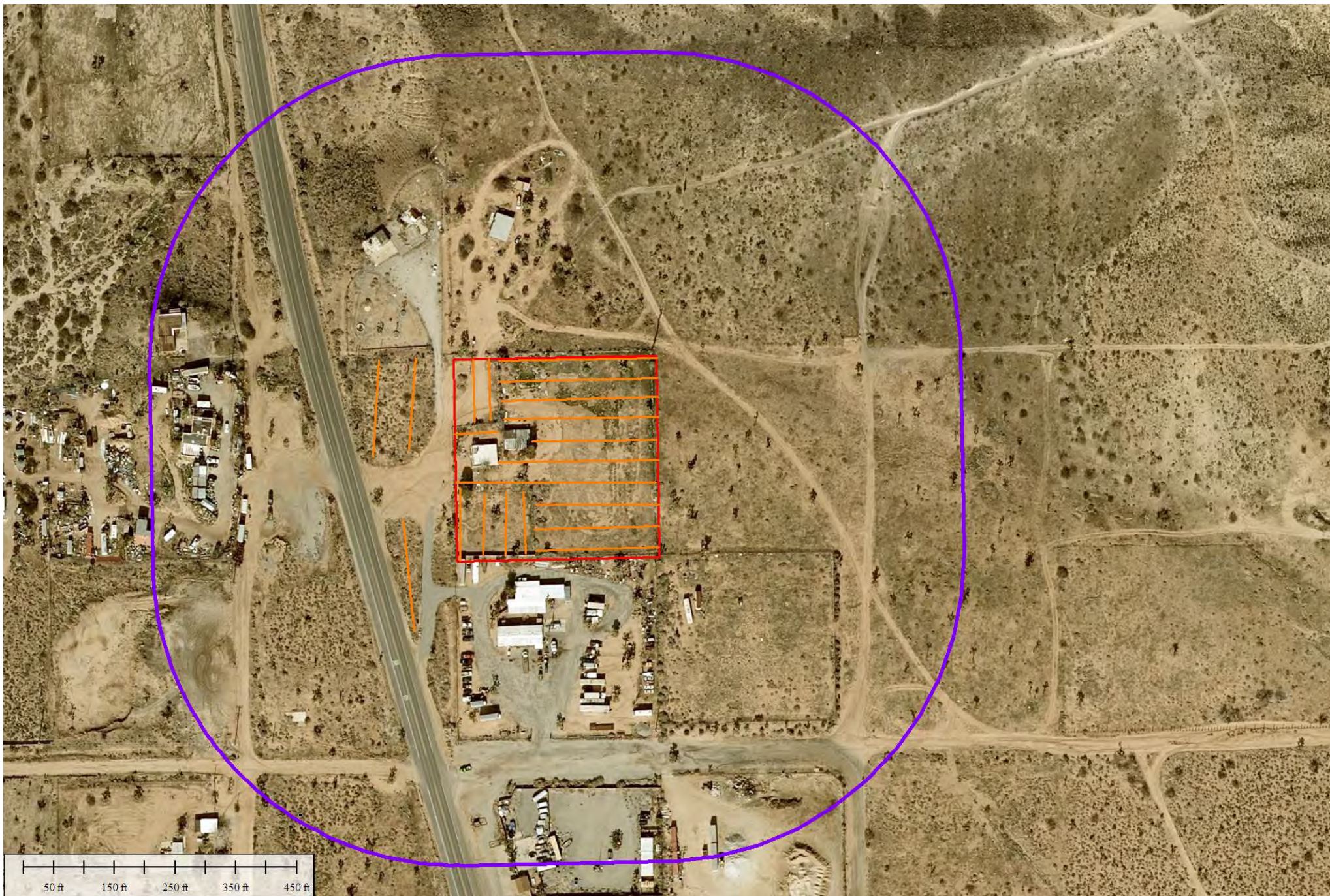


Figure 4
BUOW Survey Area Map
APN 059-708-121
Town of Yucca Valley
San Bernardino County, California

Legend

-  Property Boundary
-  500-Foot Buffer

-  Transect



APPENDIX A



View of existing structure on the northwest portion of the site.



View of existing structure and ornamental trees on western portion of site.



View facing east of existing structures on site and the maintained areas on the property.



View of the disturbed habitat on the northern portion of the site.



View of tarps on the disturbed habitat on the southern portion of the site. The tarps are placed to solarize invasive seeds.



View of southern portion of the site from the east facing west.