

4.4 WILDLIFE

4.4.1 Proposed Project

4.4.1.1 Affected Environment

The California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) identified a total of 39 sensitive species¹ near the Project area. These species are discussed in Table 4.4-1: Criteria for Evaluating Potential for Occurrence of Sensitive Wildlife Species. Appendix A - Biological Evaluation includes a complete discussion of the CNDDDB findings and species observed during the 2007 Project-specific biological surveys conducted by the Chambers Group.

A sensitive species is considered a potential inhabitant of the Proposed Project area if its known geographical distribution encompasses part of the Proposed Project area or if its distribution is near the area and if general habitat requirements or environmental conditions (e.g., soil type, elevation, vegetation assemblage, etc.) required for the species are present at the time of the survey. The potential for each sensitive wildlife species to occur in the Proposed Project area was assessed during the field survey and literature review. Potential for occurrence is based on the criteria listed in Table 4.4-1: Criteria for Evaluating Potential for Occurrence of Sensitive Wildlife Species.

Table 4.4-1: Criteria for Evaluating Potential for Occurrence of Sensitive Wildlife Species

Potential for Occurrence	Criteria
Absent	Species was not observed during surveys and species is restricted to habitats or environmental conditions that do not occur within the Proposed Project area.
Low	CNDDDB records for this species do not exist within the immediate vicinity (approximately 5 miles) of the Proposed Project area and/or habitats or environmental conditions needed to support the species are of poor quality.
Moderate	Either a CNDDDB record exists of the species within the immediate vicinity of the Proposed Project area (approximately 5 miles) and marginal habitat exists on the site or the habitat requirements or environmental conditions associated with the species occur within the Project area, but no CNDDDB records exist within the vicinity.
High	Both a CNDDDB record exists of the species within the Proposed Project area or its immediate vicinity (approximately 5 miles), and the habitat requirements or environmental conditions associated with the species occur within the Proposed Project area.
Present	Species was observed or detected within the Proposed Project area at the time of the survey.

CNDDDB information on the location of some sensitive species is not available; therefore, the presence of environmental conditions or habitats associated with species occurrence requirements was used to determine potential for occurrence. Sensitive species and their potential for occurrence in the Proposed Project area are discussed in Table 4.4-2: Sensitive Wildlife Species Potentially Occurring within the Project Area.

¹ Special-status species are those animals that are listed or proposed for listing under federal and/or state Endangered Species Acts as endangered or threatened; federal or state candidates for possible listing as endangered or threatened; California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) Species of Special Concern or CDFG Fully Protected species; and/or listed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as a Sensitive Animal.

Table 4.4-2: Sensitive Wildlife Species Potentially Occurring within the Project Area

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
CLASS REPTILIA	REPTILES					
<i>Gopherus agassizii</i>	Desert tortoise	Inhabits river washes, rocky hillsides, slopes, and flat deserts with sandy or gravelly soils in Southern California.	FT CT	High – Known to occur within the Project vicinity. Positive sign, including burrows and scat, found during Chambers Group 2007 surveys.	High – Known to occur within the Project vicinity. Positive sign, including burrows and scat, found during Chambers Group 2007 surveys.	High – Known to occur within the Project vicinity. Positive sign, including burrows and scat, found during Chambers Group 2007 surveys.
<i>Heloderma suspectum cinctum</i>	Banded Gila monster	Inhabits shrubby, grassy, and succulent desert with permanent or intermittent streams in extreme eastern Riverside and San Bernardino Counties in California.	BLM CSC	Low – due to limited habitat. No reported occurrences in the Project vicinity.	Low – due to limited habitat. No reported occurrences in the Project vicinity.	Absent – due to lack of habitat. No occurrences reported in the Project vicinity.
<i>Phrynosoma coronatum</i>	California horned lizard	Occurs in several habitat types, including areas with an exposed gravelly-sandy substrate containing scattered shrubs.	CSC	Absent – Outside range for this species. No occurrences reported in the Project vicinity.	Absent – Outside range for this species. No occurrences reported in the Project vicinity.	Low – due to limited habitat. No reported occurrences in the Project vicinity.

² Key to Listing Status

FT: Federal Threatened

BLM: California Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Sensitive Animal Species

CE: California State Endangered CT: California State Threatened

CFP: California Fully Protected Species CSC: California Species of Special Concern

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<i>Uma scoparia</i>	Mojave fringe-toed lizard	Habitat specialist found in habitats with windblown (aeolian) sand.	BLM CSC	Low – due to limited windblown sand habitat. No reported occurrences in the Project vicinity.	Low – due to limited windblown sand habitat. No reported occurrences in the Project vicinity.	Low – due to limited windblown sand habitat. No reported occurrences in the Project vicinity.
CLASS AVES	BIRDS					
<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	Cooper's hawk (nesting)	Habitats include open woodlands, mature forests, woodland edges, and river groves.	CSC	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.
<i>Accipiter striatus</i>	Sharp-shinned hawk (nesting)	Habitats include open deciduous woodlands, savannas, mixed or coniferous forests, thickets, and forest edges.	CSC	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.
<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Golden eagle (nesting and wintering)	Prefers mountainous or hilly terrain for foraging. Nests on cliff faces, walled canyons, or in tall trees. In central California, the golden eagle nests primarily in open grasslands and oak savannas.	CSC CFP	Moderate – Limited suitable nesting habitat occurs in the Project area. This species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Moderate – Limited suitable nesting habitat occurs in the Project area. This species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited suitable nesting habitat occurs in the Project area (Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use area). This species may forage in the Project vicinity.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	Burrowing owl (burrow sites)	Inhabits dry, open, annual, or perennial short grasslands, deserts, treeless plains, coastal dunes, rangelands, scrublands and occasionally urban areas characterized by low-growing vegetation.	BLM CSC	Moderate – Suitable habitat occurs in the Project area. Potential burrows were detected during the desert tortoise surveys in 2007; however, this species was not directly observed.	Moderate – Suitable habitat occurs in the Project area. Potential burrows were detected during the desert tortoise surveys in 2007; however, this species was not directly observed.	Moderate – Suitable habitat occurs in the Project area. This species was not directly observed during the jurisdictional wetland delineations or desert tortoise surveys in 2007.
<i>Buteo regalis</i>	Ferruginous hawk (wintering)	Winters in open terrain from grasslands to deserts where pocket gophers, ground squirrels, or rabbits are abundant, and it nests in either natural or human-made structures or on cliffs, buttes, cut banks, shrubs, or trees.	CSC	Low – Limited wintering habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Limited wintering habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Limited wintering habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.
<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	Swainson's hawk	Forages in open stands of grass-dominated vegetation, sparse shrublands, and small, open woodlands. It typically nests in scattered trees within these grassland, shrubland, or agricultural landscapes.	CT	Moderate – Limited suitable scrubland occurs in the Project area. This species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Moderate – Limited suitable scrubland occurs in the Project area. This species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Moderate – Limited suitable scrubland occurs in the Project area. This species may forage in the Project vicinity.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Northern harrier (nesting)	Habitats include wetlands, marshy meadows, boglands, pasturelands, wet grasslands, old fields, tundra, open riparian woodlands, and freshwater and brackish marshes.	CSC	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.
<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Merlin (wintering)	Migratory habitats include foothills, marshes, and open coastlines. Wintering habitats include open grasslands, semi-open forests, and coastal areas (i.e., beach dunes, marshes, and tidal flats).	CSC	Low – Very limited wintering habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited wintering habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited wintering habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.
<i>Falco mexicanus</i>	Prairie falcon (nesting)	Prefers open grasslands, shrub-steppe desert, and mixed shrub grasslands at all elevations up to 3,350 meters; it usually requires cliffs or rock outcroppings for nest sites.	CSC	Moderate – Limited suitable nesting habitat occurs in the Project area; although this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Moderate – Limited suitable nesting habitat occurs in the Project area; although this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited suitable nesting habitat occurs in the Project area (OHV use); although this species may forage in the Project vicinity.
<i>Falco peregrinus anatum</i>	American peregrine falcon (nesting)	Utilizes a broad array of habitats, including urban areas, and nests on cliff faces and other high, vertical surfaces, including skyscrapers in metropolitan areas.	CE CFP	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.	Low – Very limited nesting habitat, though this species may forage in the Project vicinity.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<i>Amphispiza belli belli</i>	Bell's sage sparrow	Breeds primarily in chamise chaparral along the coastal side of California. It also breeds less commonly in coastal sage, mixed chaparral, and big sagebrush communities. Wintering birds of this subspecies may migrate to desert floors or remain in their breeding habitats.	CSC	High – Plentiful suitable habitat exists with a number of reported CNDDDB occurrences in the Project area.	High – Plentiful suitable habitat exists with a number of reported CNDDDB occurrences in the Project area.	High – Plentiful suitable habitat exists with a number of reported CNDDDB occurrences in the Project area.
<i>Asio otus</i>	Short-eared owl (nesting)	Uncommon winter migrant in southern California. Breeding habitats include grasslands, prairies, dunes, tundra, meadows, irrigated fields, wetlands, and fresh and saltwater marshes. Winter habitats include open lots, rock quarries, shrub thickets, and stubble fields.	CSC	Low – Limited scrubby winter habitat occurs in the Project area.	Low – Limited scrubby winter habitat occurs in the Project area.	Low – Limited scrubby winter habitat occurs in the Project area.
<i>Eremophila alpestris actia</i>	California horned lark	Occurs in a variety of open habitats, including bare ground, sparse short grasslands, dry prairies, open fields, deserts, brushy flats, tundra, and developed habitats. It is present in the winter mostly in flocks.	CSC	High – Plentiful suitable habitat exists with a number of reported CNDDDB occurrences in the Project area.	High – Plentiful suitable habitat exists with a number of reported CNDDDB occurrences in the Project area.	High – Plentiful suitable habitat exists with a number of reported CNDDDB occurrences in the Project area.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	Loggerhead shrike (nesting)	Habitats may include oak savannas, open chaparral, desert washes, juniper woodlands, Joshua tree woodlands, and other semi-open areas. It can occupy a variety of semi-open habitats with scattered trees, large shrubs, utility poles, and other structures that serve as lookout posts for potential prey.	CSC	High – Plentiful suitable habitat exists with a number of reported CNDDDB occurrences in the Project area.	High – Plentiful suitable habitat exists with a number of reported CNDDDB occurrences in the Project area.	Moderate – Suitable habitat exists with a few reported CNDDDB occurrences in the Project area.
<i>Larus californicus</i>	California gull (nesting colony)	Winter resident of Pacific Coast, but breeds around lake environments of the arid interior western region of North America, including Mono Lake, California. Inhabits open water, mudflats, and salt panne habitats.	CSC	Low – Migrants may occur, and wintering residents may occur at garbage dumps. No nesting colonies are expected in the Project vicinity.	Low – Migrants may occur, and wintering residents may occur at garbage dumps. No nesting colonies are expected in the Project vicinity.	Low – Migrants may occur, and wintering residents may occur at garbage dumps. No nesting colonies are expected in the Project vicinity.
<i>Toxostoma bendirei</i>	Bendire's thrasher	Inhabits relatively open grassland, shrubland, or woodland with scattered shrubs or trees.	BLM CSC	Moderate – Suitable open shrubland occurs within the Project area.	Moderate – Suitable open shrubland occurs within the Project area.	Moderate – Suitable open shrubland occurs within the Project area.
<i>Toxostoma crissale</i>	Crissal's thrasher	Inhabits desert washes, riparian thickets, brushy plains, foothill scrub, or occasionally in piñon-oak-juniper woodlands where there is a shrubby understory	CSC	Moderate – Suitable open shrubland occurs within the Project area.	Moderate – Suitable open shrubland occurs within the Project area.	Moderate – Suitable open shrubland occurs within the Project area.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<i>Toxostoma lecontei</i>	LeConte's thrasher	Sparsely vegetated desert flats, dunes, alluvial fans, or gently rolling hills having high proportion of ≥1 species of saltbush or shadscale (<i>Atriplex</i> spp.) and/or cylindrical cholla cactus (<i>Opuntia</i> spp.) 0.9–1.9 meters high.	BLM CSC	Moderate – Suitable desert flats and gentle foothills with saltbrush occur within the Project area.	Moderate – Suitable desert flats and gentle foothills with saltbrush occur within the Project area.	Low – Limited and disturbed desert flats and gentle foothills with saltbrush occur within the Project area.
<i>Vireo vicinior</i>	Gray vireo	Inhabits mixed juniper/piñon and oak scrub associations and/or chaparral in hot, arid mountains and high plains scrubland. In the mountains of Mojave Desert in southeastern California, inhabits piñon-juniper woodlands.	CSC	Moderate – Limited suitable scrubland occurs in the Project area.	Moderate – Limited suitable scrubland occurs in the Project area.	Low – Limited and disturbed scrubland (heavy OHV area) occurs in the Project area.
CLASS MAMMALIA	MAMMALS					
<i>Antrozous pallidus</i>	Pallid bat	Inhabits arid desert scrub, oak woodlands, juniper woodlands, grasslands, coniferous forests, and water-associated habitats; prefers rocky outcrops for roost sites.	BLM CSC	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<i>Choeronycteris mexicana</i>	Mexican long-tongued bat	Found in montane riparian, desert succulent scrub, and pinyon-juniper habitats; known to roost in mines, caves, and buildings.	CSC	Low – due to limited roosting habitat.	Low – due to limited roosting habitat.	Low – due to limited roosting habitat.
<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>	Townsend's big-eared bat	Rare in California and roosts occur in caves, buildings, tunnels, mines, and other human-made structures.	BLM CSC	Low – due to limited roosting habitat.	Low – due to limited roosting habitat.	Low – due to limited roosting habitat.
<i>Eumops perotis</i>	Western mastiff bat	A cliff-dwelling species found in a variety of habitats that roosts under rocky cliffs and canyons, large boulders, and buildings.	CSC BLM	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.
<i>Eurderma maculatum</i>	Spotted bat	Habitats include arid deserts, grasslands, and mixed conifer forests. Prefers to roost in rock crevices, but will also use caves and buildings.	BLM CSC	Low – Although within range, this species is considered to have a low potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Low – Although within range, this species is considered to have a low potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Low – Although within range, this species is considered to have a low potential due to limited roosting habitat.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<i>Macrotus californicus</i>	California leaf-nosed bat	Inhabits desert riparian, desert wash, desert scrub, desert succulent shrub, alkali desert scrub, and palm oasis habitats. Roost sites include tunnels, rock shelters, mines, caves, buildings, and bridges.	BLM CSC	Low – Although within range, this species is considered to have a low potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Low – Although within range, this species is considered to have a low potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Low – Although within range, this species is considered to have a low potential due to limited roosting habitat.
<i>Nyctinomops femorosaccus</i>	Pocketed free-tailed bat	Inhabits pinyon-juniper woodlands, desert scrub, desert succulent shrub, desert riparian, desert washes, alkali desert scrub, Joshua tree, and palm oasis habitats; roosts in rock crevices, caverns, roof tiles, and buildings.	CSC	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.
<i>Nyctinomops macrotis</i>	Big free-tailed bat	Inhabits a variety of desert vegetation communities and prefers roosting in rugged cliff faces, slopes, and outcrops.	CSC	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited roosting habitat.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<i>Microtus californicus mohavensis</i>	Mohave River mole	Occupies moist habitats along the Mojave River.	BLM CSC	Absent – Not within range of this species.	Absent – Not within range of this species.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, the fiber optic cable will be attached to an existing bridge over the Mojave River. No impacts to the river will occur.
<i>Chaetodipus fallax pallidus</i>	Pallid San Diego pocket mouse	Found in arid desert border areas of San Diego County, in Riverside County southwest of Palm Springs, in San Bernardino County from Cactus Flat to Oro Grande, and east to Twentynine Palms.	CSC	Absent – Not within range of this species.	Absent – Not within range of this species.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential due to limited suitable habitat.
<i>Neotoma lepida intermedia</i>	San Diego desert woodrat	Inhabits moderate to dense canopies in a variety of shrub and desert habitats, especially in rock outcrops, rocky cliffs, and slopes in Southern California	CSC	High – Project site within range and suitable habitat exists.	High – Project site within range and suitable habitat exists.	High – Project site within range and suitable habitat exists.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<i>Onychomys torridus ramona</i>	Southern grasshopper mouse	Found throughout southern California in grasslands and sparse sage scrub habitats.	CSC	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential within the Project area.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential within the Project area.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential within the Project area.
<i>Perognathus longimembris bangsi</i>	Palm Springs pocket mouse	Generally, habitat is described as having level to gently sloping topography, sparse to moderate vegetative cover, and loosely packed or sandy soils.	BLM CSC	Absent – Not within range of this species.	Absent – Not within range of this species.	Moderate – Project site within range; however, this species is considered to have a moderate potential within the Project area.
<i>Spermophilus mohavensis</i>	Mohave ground squirrel	Occupies all major desert scrub habitats in the western Mojave Desert. Generally found in flat to moderate sloped terrain, most frequently in sandy and alluvial soils. Occasionally found in gravelly and rocky soils.	CT	Absent – Not within range of this species.	Absent – Not within range of this species.	High – Suitable habitat exists and CNDBB records are within 5 miles of the Project.
<i>Taxidea taxus</i>	American badger	Inhabits grasslands, savannas, montane meadows, sparse scrublands, and deserts; prefers friable soils for burrowing, and relatively open, uncultivated ground.	CSC	Present – Observed on site during desert tortoise surveys in 2007.	High – Project site within range and suitable habitat exists.	Low – limited suitable habitat exists due to off-road vehicle use in area.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Habitat	Status Designation ²	Occurrence Potential		
				Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
<i>Ovis Canadensis nelsoni</i>	Nelson's bighorn sheep	Occurs in open desert slopes below 4,000 feet in elevation from San Gorgonio Pass south into Mexico; optimal habitat includes steep walled canyons and ridges bisected by rocky or sandy washes with available water.	BLM	Low – Suitable habitat does not exist within the Project area; however, the slopes adjacent to the Project area may provide limited suitable habitat. This species was not observed during the 2007 surveys.	Low – Suitable habitat does not exist within the Project area; however, the slopes adjacent to the Project area may provide limited suitable habitat. This species was not observed during the 2007 surveys.	Low – Suitable habitat does not exist within the Project area; however, the slopes adjacent to the Project area may provide limited suitable habitat. Note: potential bighorn sheep scat was identified during desert tortoise surveys in 2007.

A total of 39 special-status species have been identified with the potential to be in the Proposed Project area. There is one federally listed threatened species, the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), that is known to occur within the Proposed Project vicinity. Suitable habitat and CNDDDB records for a state-listed threatened species, the Mohave ground squirrel (*Spermophilus mohavensis*), exists in the area of Segment 3. Five California Species of Concern—Bell's sage sparrow (*Amphispiza belli belli*), California horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris actia*), loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), San Diego woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*), and American badger (*Taxidea taxus*)—have a high potential to occur in the Proposed Project area. Potential impacts to these species are described as follows.

The other 32 wildlife species (listed in Table 4.4-2 Sensitive Wildlife Species Potentially Occurring within the Project Area and Appendix A - Biological Evaluation) that have a moderate or low potential to occur in the Proposed Project area are not expected to be at risk because they are unlikely to present during Project activities. Biologists monitoring the area for desert tortoises and Mohave ground squirrels will be required to be monitor for all other sensitive species, and will be authorized to temporarily halt or redirect Project activities to the extent necessary to keep any observed wildlife out of harm's way (refer to section 2.4.2 Wildlife for a complete list of applicant-proposed measures [APMs]).

Desert Tortoise

The desert tortoise is a state- and federally listed threatened species. The desert tortoise ranges from southwestern Utah and southern Nevada to the south through southeastern California and southwestern Arizona into northern Mexico. In California, the historic range of this species includes northeastern Los Angeles, eastern Kern, eastern San Diego, and southeastern Inyo counties, as well as most of San Bernardino, Riverside, and Imperial counties.

The Desert Tortoise (Mojave Population) Recovery Plan (Recovery Plan) (United States (U.S.) Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] 1994) identifies the current status and habitat requirements of the tortoise, recovery objectives, delisting criteria, recovery strategy, actions to achieve recovery, and potential costs and schedules for recovery. The Mojave population of the desert tortoise was listed as threatened on April 2, 1990, and the USFWS designated critical habitat for the species on February 8, 1994.

The desert tortoise inhabits river washes, rocky hillsides, slopes, and flat deserts with sandy or gravelly soils. Soil conditions must be friable for burrow and nest construction. Creosote bush, burrobush, saltbush, Joshua tree, Mojave yucca, and cacti are often present in the habitat along with other desert shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers. It is entirely herbivorous and forages on a variety of plants, including cactus species and annual vegetation.

The desert tortoise is a medium-sized tortoise with an adult carapace length of approximately 8 inches to 14 inches. Males, on average, are larger than females and are distinguished by a more concave plastron, longer gular horns, larger chin glands on each side of the lower jaw, and longer tails. Carapace color varies from light yellow-brown (horn color) to dark grey-brown. Besides range, a composite of characteristics often is necessary to distinguish the desert tortoise from other species of gopher tortoise, but its most unique feature is its very large hind feet. Desert tortoise populations are declining due to habitat loss, predation, illegal collecting, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use.

Tortoises seek shelter in burrows or rock crevices where temperatures are more favorable and store and conserve water to help reduce stress. They obtain water primarily from their herbivorous diet, but will drink quantities of water when available. They can store water in their large urinary bladders (up to 40 percent of their body weight in water and urinary waste). The water in their urinary bladders can be extracted when needed. Wild tortoises should never be touched due to the fact that they often void the water out of their urinary bladder when handled. To conserve water, they excrete their nitrogenous wastes in the form of uric acid, which contains very little water compared to the urea humans eliminate.

The BLM initiated formal consultation with the USFWS for the Proposed Project in November, 2007. The USFWS provided a Biological Opinion, included as Appendix C - Biological Opinion, for the Proposed Project on May 20, 2008. One 7-mile-long segment of the Project and two laydown yards lie within the

boundaries of the Ivanpah Critical Habitat Unit for the desert tortoise; however, the Proposed Project work areas were reported to occur entirely on existing utility roads and disturbed areas that do not contain the primary constituent elements of critical habitat for the desert tortoise. The BLM thus concluded that the Proposed Project would not affect critical habitat. As a result, the USFWS stated that they would not discuss critical habitat in the Biological Opinion. Focused surveys for desert tortoise have been conducted along the proposed cable route and the results are discussed in Appendix A - Biological Evaluation. No other federally listed species or habitats are known to occur within the Proposed Project area.

Mohave Ground Squirrel

Although the Mohave ground squirrel has not been sighted, captured, or otherwise confirmed in the immediate vicinity of the AT&T Corp. (AT&T) fiber optic cable route, the extant soils, vegetation types (habitat), and topography are generally suitable for the species within Segment 3, specifically along Stoddard Wells Road. A habitat assessment for the Mohave ground squirrel was conducted along the proposed cable route in December 2007 and is provided as Appendix B - Mohave Ground Squirrel Habitat Assessment. No other state-listed species or habitats are known to occur within the Proposed Project area.

The Mohave ground squirrel was listed as threatened (originally termed Rare) in 1971 by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). Degradation and loss of habitat, patchy distribution, and its strong dependence on noteworthy winter/spring rainfall (with the attendant availability of forbs and shrub foliage and flowers) for successful reproduction (and therefore population growth/expansion) are the primary reasons for its threatened status. More specifically, different types of land disturbance (e.g., development, cultivation, vehicle activity, grazing) are very likely important factors in the near extirpation of the Mohave ground squirrel in the heavily developed southern part of its range.

The Mohave ground squirrel is small (approximately 9 inches long) with a pale brown back and creamy white belly. Unlike the common co-occurring antelope ground squirrel (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*), it has no stripes or spots, is active only during the spring-summer months, and spends most (approximately 7 months) of the year aestivating below ground. The Mohave ground squirrel requires an ample supply of herbaceous plants and, probably to a lesser degree, shrubs in order to successfully reproduce; therefore, its populations can be reduced to very low levels during periods of drought.

The species has been found in all of the broadly described plant communities of the western Mojave Desert, including saltbush scrub, creosote bush scrub, shadscale scrub, desert sink scrub, and Joshua Tree Woodland. It prefers sandy soils, does not occur on dry lake beds, and only rarely is found in areas exhibiting rocky or gravelly (e.g., desert pavement) substrates. The species usually occurs in level to gently sloping terrain, occasionally occurs on steeper slopes, and has been found at elevations as high as 5,600 feet.

Bell's Sage Sparrow

Sage sparrows have both resident and migratory populations. Bell's sage sparrow (sometimes referred to as the Pacific sage sparrow) is one of five subspecies of sage sparrows and is a resident of the coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitats of southern California. A separate interior subspecies of sage sparrow breeds in scrub habitat of the Mojave and great basin deserts, but also occurs on the coast side of the mountains of California during the winter.

The Bell's subspecies is listed by the CDFG as a species of special concern. Clearing of sage scrub, sagebrush, and chaparral vegetation for development and grazing is reported to have a significant negative effect on its population.

Bell's sage sparrow is a medium-sized sparrow approximately 5 inches to 6 inches in length with a relatively long tail. It is generally identified by a dark gray head with white eye rings and small white patches in front of both eyes. It has a white breast and belly with an isolated dark spot on its breast and broad dark and light lateral throat stripes. Markings on the Bell's subspecies and the interior subspecies are very similar, but the Bell's sage sparrow is generally darker.

Sage sparrows generally prefer semi-open areas of sagebrush or chaparral scrub vegetation with widely spaced shrubs approximately 2 feet to 6 feet high. They forage for grass seed and insects on the ground and often run on the ground between shrubs with their tail angled high. It is a year-round resident of coastal and interior areas of California.

Creosote bush-white bursage scrub vegetation community is found throughout the Proposed Project area. This vegetation community could provide abundant habitat for this species within all three segments. Due to the presence of suitable habitat and multiple reported occurrences in the Proposed Project area, there is a high potential for this species to forage and possibly nest within the Proposed Project area.

California Horned Lark

The California horned lark is on the CDFG Watch List, is listed by the CDFG as a species of special concern, and is an International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources animal of Least Concern. Horned larks are brown with a black breast and have a yellowish face with two small black "horns."

The California horned lark thrives in open habitats absent of abundant trees or shrubs. It is found in a variety of habitat types, including coastal grasslands, desert, and alpine dwarf shrub habitat above the treeline. During breeding season, it feeds mostly on insects, snails, and spiders, and at other times of the year, their diet may also include grass and forb seeds.

The California horned lark utilizes waterholes when available, but it has been known to survive without water for 16 to 31 days in captivity. It winters in California, and California horned lark numbers are often augmented at this time due to out-of-state migrants.

This species utilizes grasses, shrubs, rocks, and clods of soil for cover. It builds cup-shaped grass-lined nests in depressions on the ground or in the open. Breeding season for this species is from March through July, with peak activity in May.

The California horned lark may occur within all vegetation communities within the Proposed Project area, including disturbed and ruderal, dry washes, Joshua tree woodlands, allscale series, creosote bush series, creosote bush-white bursage scrub, and developed areas. Due to the abundant habitat and known occurrences of this species within the Proposed Project area, there is a high potential for this species to forage or nest within the Proposed Project area.

Loggerhead Shrike

The loggerhead shrike is one of two shrike species that occur in California. The two species are very similar in appearance and their ranges only overlap in the winter. The second species, the northern shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) occurs primarily in the northern United States and is only a rare and occasional visitor to Southern California. The loggerhead shrike is listed by the CDFG as a species of special concern.

The loggerhead shrike is an uncommon to common yearlong resident in San Bernardino County, occurring in woodlands and savannahs including pinyon-juniper woodlands, Joshua tree savannahs, riparian woodlands, desert oases, scrub, and desert wash habitats. This species is approximately 9 inches in length and is identified by its grey body, dark wings, white throat, and a striking broad black band across its face.

The loggerhead shrike may occur within several vegetation communities within the Proposed Project area, including desert washes, Joshua tree woodlands, creosote bush series, and creosote bush-white bursage scrub. Due to the abundant habitat coupled with several known occurrences of this species within the vicinity of Segment 1 and Segment 2, there is a high potential for this species to forage and possibly nest within these segments. Although there is abundant suitable habitat for this species in

Segment 3, there have been only a few known occurrences of this species in this area; thus, there is a moderate potential for this species to occur.

San Diego Desert Woodrat

The San Diego desert woodrat is restricted to coastal slopes with coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitats throughout southern California, including San Diego, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties. Woodrats make middens (nests) of twigs, sticks, cactus parts, and rocks, depending on the availability of building materials. This species forages on coast live oak, chamise, and buckwheat. The San Diego desert woodrat is listed by the CDFG as a species of special concern.

The species is associated with sage scrub and chaparral wherever there are rock outcrops, boulders, cactus patches and dense undergrowth. Because the Proposed Project area supports this habitat and is located within the species known range, the San Diego desert woodrat has a high potential to forage and possibly nest near or within the Proposed Project area.

American Badgers

In California, American badgers occupy a diversity of habitats including drier, open stages of most shrub, forest, and herbaceous habitats with friable soils. The principal requirements of this badger are sufficient food, friable soils, and relatively open, uncultivated ground. Grasslands, savannas, and mountain meadows near timberline are preferred. Badgers prey primarily on burrowing rodents, such as gophers (*Thomomys* spp.), ground squirrels, and kangaroo rats (*Dipodomys* spp.). The American badger is listed by the CDFG as a species of special concern.

This species inhabits scrublands and desert washes located within Segment 1 and Segment 2, which are located in the known range of the species. The American badger was observed during biological surveys of Segment 1 and there is a high potential for this species to occur within this segment of the Proposed Project area. Segment 2 supports abundant habitat for the species and is located within the range of this species; thus, there is a high potential for this species to occur within this segment. The American badger is not likely to occur within Segment 3 due to heavy off-road vehicle use in the area.

Fish and Wildlife Migration Routes

There are no significant established fish or wildlife migratory corridors or wildlife nursery sites within the Proposed Project area.

4.4.1.2 Significance Criteria

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act, impacts to wildlife resources would be considered significant if the Proposed Project:

- would have a substantial adverse direct or indirect effect on a special-status species listed by the USFWS, CDFG, or regional or local regulations; and/or
- would substantially interfere with the movement of migratory fish or wildlife, or affect established wildlife migratory corridors, or wildlife nursery sites.

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), consideration of significant impact on the human environment is conducted in accordance with Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.27 (specified in Section 1.2.1 Relationship to NEPA Guidelines). Following the public comment period, a finding regarding a significant impact will be prepared in accordance with this provision.

4.4.1.3 Impacts and Mitigation

A Project-specific Biological Evaluation Report (BE) (Appendix A - Biological Evaluation) was prepared and submitted to the USFWS in order to support Section 7 Consultation under the Endangered Species Act for the Proposed Project. In response, the USFWS issued a corresponding Biological Opinion for the Proposed Project on May 20, 2008, which is included as Appendix C - Biological Opinion. In addition, a

Mohave Ground Squirrel Habitat Assessment (MGS HA) (Appendix B - Mohave Ground Squirrel Habitat Assessment) has been prepared for the Proposed Project. The BE and MGS HA define the environmental baseline, the potential effects, and APMs to avoid and minimize the Proposed Project's effects on sensitive biological resources. A summary of the Proposed Project's potential effects and APMs are described as follows.

Special-Status Species

The Proposed Project may result in a maximum temporary disturbance of approximately 34.3 acres of habitat that could potentially be used by desert tortoise, Mohave ground squirrel, and other special-status wildlife species (refer to Section 2.1.5 Temporary Disturbance for acreage information). On May 20, 2008, the USFWS issued a Biological Opinion for the Proposed Project—Biological Opinion on the AT&T Corporation's Fiber Optic Cable Replacement Project, San Bernardino County, California—which states that the Proposed Project “is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the desert tortoise” (USFWS 2008). In general, potential impacts of the Proposed Project would be limited to areas of low quality, previously disturbed habitat found directly adjacent to the existing roads within the temporary right-of-way (ROW). No major modification to habitat would occur.

Suitable burrowing substrate for desert tortoise and Mohave ground squirrel exists along the Proposed Project ROW. Although the Proposed Project route is located within existing roads, heavy vehicles could compact the soil in and adjacent to the road and render it unsuitable for burrowing activities for desert tortoise and Mohave ground squirrel. No burrows were identified within the fiber optic cable route; however, potential tortoise burrows were identified from 100 feet to 300 feet from the cable route. Because these burrows are outside of the Project area, they would not be directly or indirectly affected by construction. The specific location of underground cable marker posts would be established by the Biological Monitor so that no small burrows would be affected by marker post installation. Additionally, Biological Monitors would collect information on the precise locations of the existing tortoise burrows and would inspect and flag the burrows to avoid potential harm to the burrows and any associated occupants prior to construction.

Vegetation that exists along the berms of roadways includes native shrubs, annual flowering plants, and exotic plants. Although these areas were previously disturbed by construction of the original installation of the fiber optic cable in 1988–89, this vegetation now provides an available food source for desert tortoise and other special-status wildlife species. This existing vegetation could be crushed by vehicles during Proposed Project activities. Crushing of vegetation may occur within Segment 1, a section of Segment 2, and the Department of Water and Power portion of Segment 3, where the road narrows to approximately 10 feet to 15 feet in width. Temporarily crushing vegetation could cause root damage; however, the damage is anticipated to be minimal and vegetation should re-establish along the roads³ (Section 2.1.5 Temporary Disturbance); therefore, impacts to the available food sources should be less than significant.

The potential exists for unintended releases of bentonite drilling muds into fractures of the drilled substrate (frac-outs). In addition, lubricants applied to the insides of the conduit walls by blowing a lubricant-soaked sponge through the conduit could unintentionally spill and affect tortoises, Mohave ground squirrel, and their burrows, potentially trapping them inside. Fuel spills or leaks could adversely affect desert tortoise, Mohave ground squirrel, other special-status species, and associated vegetation. AT&T would adhere to its Spill Prevention and Contingency Plan (Appendix G - Spill Prevention and Contingency Plan) in the event that spilling or leaking takes place. As a result, impacts would be less than significant.

During construction activities, short-term fragmentation of wildlife habitat could occur because wildlife would not be allowed to cross the construction area where moving vehicles or construction activities are

³ Ruderal species, such as Mediterranean grass (*Schismus barbatus*), rubber rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*), and red-stemmed filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*), will re-establish within 1 to 2 years, depending on the amount of annual rainfall. Bush species, such as allscale (*Atriplex polycarpa*), four-wing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*), spiny saltbush (*Atriplex confertiflora*), or creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), may take up to 3 years to re-establish, depending on the amount of annual rainfall.

present. This obstruction would only occur at a relatively small segment of active construction, and the impact would be minimal. Long-term fragmentation of existing habitats would not occur. No new above-ground facilities (i.e., regeneration stations) would be constructed. No modifications to existing regeneration stations would occur. As a result, impacts would be less than significant.

Short-term indirect impacts also include an increase in noise and the possibility of reduced air quality. Construction would temporarily elevate noise levels above ambient noise in and around the project area and may affect wildlife foraging, migrating, or breeding in the area. However, due to the limited duration of construction, noise impacts would be short-term and minimal, and therefore less than significant. Air quality impacts to wildlife are expected to be minimal since they would also be temporary and short-term, and mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce air quality impacts to a less-than-significant level.

Special-status wildlife species are generally not expected to be at risk because they are unlikely to be present during the Proposed Project construction activities. Biologists would monitor the area for desert tortoise and Mohave Ground Squirrel, would be required to monitor for any other special-status species, and would be authorized to temporarily halt or redirect Project activities to the extent necessary to keep any observed special-status species out of harm's way.

The Proposed Project includes APMs to minimize the take of desert tortoise and avoidance of the Mohave ground squirrel (Segment 3), and protection of other wildlife species. AT&T expects that no desert tortoise, Mohave ground squirrel, or other special-status wildlife species would be injured or killed as a result of Project implementation.

In addition to the APMs listed in Section 2.4.2 Wildlife, the USFWS issued a Biological Opinion (refer to Appendix C - Biological Opinion) for the desert tortoise, which identifies measures to protect the species. The CDFG is issuing a Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement (1600 Agreement) and a Section 2081 Incidental Take Permit for the Mohave ground squirrel. These permits identify additional measures that would be implemented for the Proposed Project. In the event that any of the APMs or permit measures conflict, the most restrictive and stringent measure will take precedence and be implemented.

Post-maintenance activities along the ROW, such as driving the line to inspect for exposure during rainstorm events and any fiber optic cable replacements, could result in injury or death of desert tortoise, Mohave ground squirrel, and other special-status species that have potential to occur on the project area. These maintenance activities would occur within the ROW and existing roads only. If maintenance outside the ROW is required, the BLM Needles Office would be contacted for consultation. Additionally, these maintenance activities already occur for the existing facilities, so there would be no additional impact as a result of this Project.

4.4.2 No Action Alternative

Selection of the No Action Alternative, as described in Section 2.5.1 No Action Alternative, would not result in construction of the Proposed Project and potential effects to the wildlife resources described in Section 4.4.1.3 Impact and Mitigation would not occur.