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ALTAMONT MOTORSPORTS PARK

CALIFORNIA TIGER SALAMANDER SITE ASSESSMENT REPORT

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(I) INTRODUCTION

On July 11, 2007, Pacific Biology conducted a site assessment of Altamont Motorsports Park (AMP) to determine if the site could be utilized by California tiger salamander (*Ambysoma californiense*). As required by the *Interim Guidance on Site Assessment and Field Surveys for Determining Presence or a Negative Finding of the California Tiger Salamander* (USFWS 2003), the field survey and other information compiled address three elements relevant to the potential occurrence of CTS on the site. These elements include: (1) is the project site within the range of the CTS; (2) what are the known localities of CTS within the project site and within 3.1 miles of the project boundaries; and (3) what are the habitats within the project site and within 1.24 miles of the project boundaries.

The Site Assessment Report is organized into the following sections:

I. Introduction
II. General Project Description
III. Methodology
IV. Overview of CTS Biology
V. Results of Site Assessment
VI. Conclusions

(II) GENERAL PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Altamont Motorsports Park (project site) is 83-acres in size and is located approximately 10 miles east of the City of Livermore in the eastern portion of Alameda County. The project site is located immediately south of the Interstate (I)-580/I-205 interchange. As shown in **Figure 1**, **Project Site Location**, the site is generally bordered by I-580 to the north and east. The project site is bordered to the west and south by several residences and large expanses of undeveloped land.

Altamont Motorsports Park opened in 1963 as a dirt oval raceway and was paved and reconfigured in 1966. Currently, approximately 35-acres (of the 83-acre facility) are developed with a paved racetrack, a pit/paddock area, grandstands, and other supporting infrastructure. The proposed project includes rezoning the site from "A-General Agriculture" to "P-Planned Development" (to provide for the continued use of the facility), the installation of a patio cover over the existing bleachers, the placement of two mobile homes on the site, and the installation of signage (to be viewed from I-580).

(III) METHODOLOGY

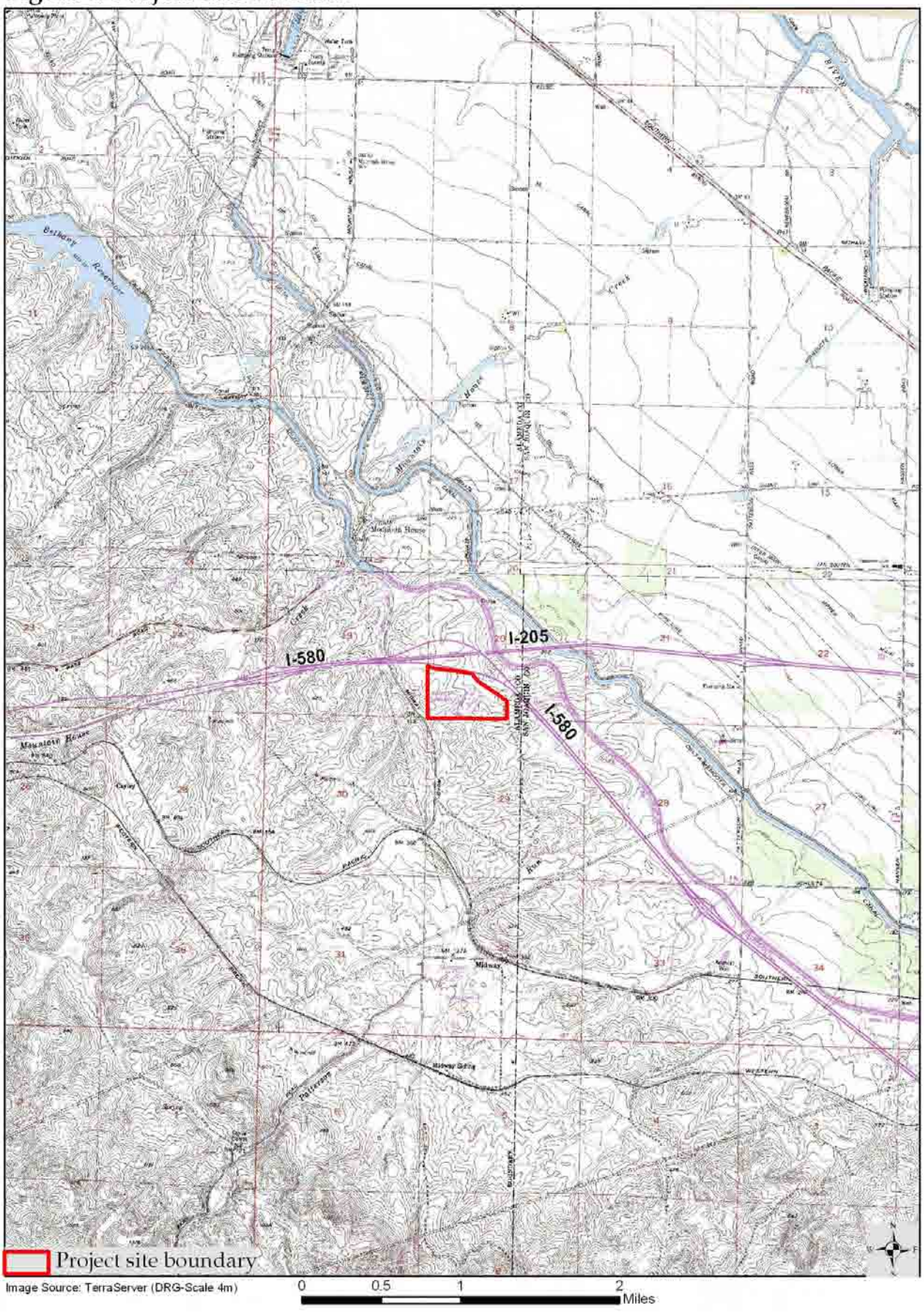
Database Search and Literature Review

The latest version of the California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB) was reviewed for the project area. The intent of the database review was to determine the closest documented occurrences of CTS to the project site. Additionally, the *Designation of Critical Habitat for the California Tiger Salamander, Central Population, Final Rule* (August 23, 2005) was reviewed, including current range maps and designated Critical Habitat units.

Field Surveys

Josh Phillips, Principal Biologist of Pacific Biology, conducted a field survey on July 11, 2007. A primary objective of the field survey was to determine if suitable CTS upland and/or breeding habitat is present on the project site. Meandering transects were walked to achieve 100 percent visual coverage of the project site and all plant and wildlife species observed were identified and recorded. Representative photographs were taken of all upland and aquatic habitats on the site.

Figure 1: Project Site Location



(IV) OVERVIEW OF CTS BIOLOGY

The California tiger salamander is a federally-listed Threatened species and a California Species of Special Concern. CTS breed and develop in seasonal pools and ponds, but otherwise spend most of their post-metamorphic lives in widely dispersed underground retreats (e.g., small mammal burrows). Following the onset of fall or winter rains, CTS emerge from upland sites on rainy nights to migrate to breeding ponds. Breeding migrations have been recorded at distances of up to 1.3 miles between upland habitat and breeding ponds (Sweet 1998). CTS require relatively long-lasting pools for completing metamorphosis and studies have shown that larvae metamorphosed and left the breeding pond 60 to 94 days (8.6 to 13.4 weeks) after the eggs have been laid (Feaver 1971), generally in late spring or early summer. Upon leaving the pond, CTS disperse and occupy upland refugia until the onset of the following year's rainy season.

(V) RESULTS OF CTS ASSESSMENT

ELEMENT 1. Is the project site within the range of the CTS?

The project site is located within the range of the Central Population of CTS, within the East Bay Region, but is not located within a designated Critical Habitat unit.[1]

ELEMENT 2. What are the known localities of CTS within the project site and within 3.1 miles of the project boundaries?

Surveys for CTS have not been conducted on the project site and the presence of the species is unknown. As shown in **Figure 2**, **Documented CTS Occurrences**, the CNDDB contains multiple records of CTS in the project region and several occurrences within 3.1 miles of the project site. The closest documented occurrence of CTS to the project site is approximately 1.7 miles to the northwest. Other occurrences within 3.1 miles of the project site occur 2.3 miles to the west and 3.0 miles to the southwest. As shown, the project site is generally located to the east of documented CTS occurrences in the area; this could be due to the lack of survey data, the extent of agricultural use east of the project site, the natural geographic distribution of the species, or other factors.

ELEMENT 3. What are the habitats within the project site and within 1.24 miles of the project boundaries?

(i) Project Site Biological Characteristics

The topography of the project site is characterized by gently rolling hills and elevations vary by approximately 100 feet from the highest and lowest locations on the property. Approximately 35-acres of the 83-acre project site contain racetrack associated uses and infrastructure. The remainder of the project site is characterized by non-native, annual grasses and sparsely vegetated areas used for parking during race events. A large population of California ground squirrels (*Spermophilus beecheyi*) is present and a high-density of burrows of this small mammal occurs throughout the project site. A seasonal detention pond is located in the northern portion of the project site. The characteristics of the grassland and seasonal detention pond are further discussed below and their location is shown on **Figure 3, Plant Communities and Land Uses**. Representative photographs of the project site are included in **Appendix A**.

[1] Federal Register / Vol. 70, No. 162 / August 23, 2005. Designation of Critical Habitat for the California Tiger Salamander, Central Population; Final Rule

Figure 2: Documented CTS Occurrences

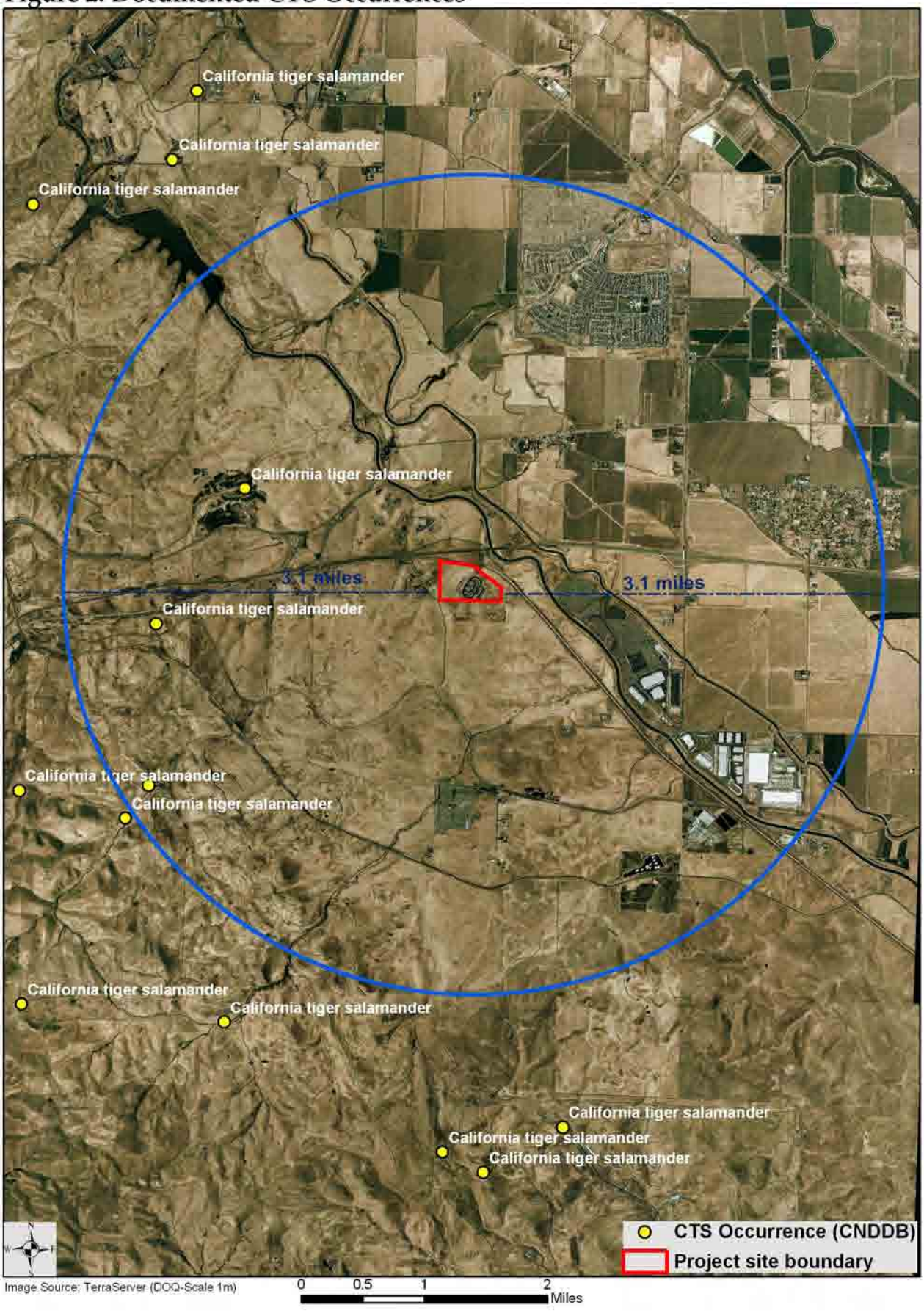


Figure 3: Plant Communities and Land Uses

California Annual Grassland

The project site is dominated by annual, non-native grasses. The dominant grass species present are soft chess (*Bromus hordeaceus*) and ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*). Shortpod mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*) also occurs in varying densities throughout the grassland. Characteristic of disturbed habitats, the site contains low botanical diversity. The west-central portion of the project site is used as a parking area during race events and contains a high concentration of small mammal burrows; vegetation within this portion of the project site is more heavily disturbed and characterized by areas of bare dirt and sparse, low-growing annual grasses.

Seasonal Detention Pond

A seasonal detention pond (approximately 200 feet by 75 feet in size) is located in the northern portion of the project site. A small area of willow trees (*Salix* sp.) occur along the eastern edge of the pond, a single cottonwood tree (*Populus fremontii*) occurs on the western edge of the pond, and cattails (*Typha latifolia*) occur in portions of the outer edge of the pond. The pond was completely dry at the time of the field survey conducted on July 11, 2007. However, given the presence of willow, cottonwood, and cattails, it is assumed that the pond has a subsurface water source and only recently dried. The pond contains a water outflow which drains to the north into a swale (which then drains to a culvert under I-580). Based on the height of the water outflow, it is assumed that the pond reaches a maximum depth of approximately 3 to 4 feet.

(ii) Biological Characteristics of Surrounding Area

As shown in **Figure 2**, the area surrounding the project site is characterized by very sparse development and large expanses of undeveloped land. Similarly to the project site, the surrounding area is characterized by rolling hills vegetated with annual grasses. Based on aerial photography, a large stock pond appears present approximately 0.9 mile west of the project site. Given the use of the surrounding grasslands for cattle grazing, it is expected that other stock ponds are also present (although their signatures are not clearly visible on available aerial photography). Also, given the presence of California ground squirrels on the project site, it is expected that this small mammal (and its associated burrows) occur in the surrounding grasslands.

The project site is bordered to the north and east by I-580. The California Aqueduct is located to the north and east of project site (north of I-205 and east of I-580). These features could pose barriers to CTS movement in these directions. However, as shown in **Figure 2**, CTS occurrences have been documented within 3.1 miles of the project site in areas not separated from the project site by I-205, I-580, or the California aqueduct.

(VI) CONCLUSIONS

The project site is within the range of the CTS and the closest documented occurrences of the species to the project site are approximately 1.7 mile to the northwest, 2.3 miles to the west, and 3.0 miles to the southwest. The seasonal detention pond on the project site provides potentially suitable CTS breeding habitat. The pond was dry at the time of the field survey conducted on July 11, 2007. However, given the presence of cattails around the pond's outer margin, the pond likely had recently dried. As such, it is reasonable to assume that the pond holds water for sufficient duration to facilitate CTS breeding and larvae metamorphosis. The grasslands on the project site contain abundant ground squirrel burrows and provide suitable upland habitat for CTS. Grassland habitat expected to contain stock ponds and small mammal burrows surrounds the project site and provides dispersal opportunities for CTS to or from the project site.

REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A – SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1: Annual grassland; east view

Photo 2: Annual grassland parking area, pond in background; view northeast

Photo 3: Seasonal Pond; east view

Photo 4: Seasonal Pond; west view

Photo 5: Small mammal burrow