

PACIFIC BIOLOGY



1212 Colusa Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94707

ALTAMONT MOTORSPORTS PARK

CALIFORNIA RED-LEGGED FROG SITE ASSESSMENT REPORT

PREPARED FOR:

**Impact Sciences
2101 Webster Street, Suite 1825
Oakland, CA 94612**

PREPARED BY:

**Pacific Biology
1212 Colusa Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94707
Contact: Josh Phillips
510/527-1008**

September 26, 2007

(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 red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*). As required by the *Revised Guidance on Site Assessments and Field Surveys for the California Red-legged Frog* (USFWS 2005), the field survey and other information compiled address three elements relevant to the potential occurrence of California red-legged frog (CRLF) on the site. These elements include: (1) is the project site within the current or historic range of the CRLF; (2) are there known records of CRLF at the site or within a 1-mile radius of the site; and (3) what are the habitats within the project site and within 1-mile of the project boundary.

The Site Assessment Report is organized into the following sections:

- I. Introduction
- II. General Project Description
- III. Methodology
- IV. Overview of CRLF 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

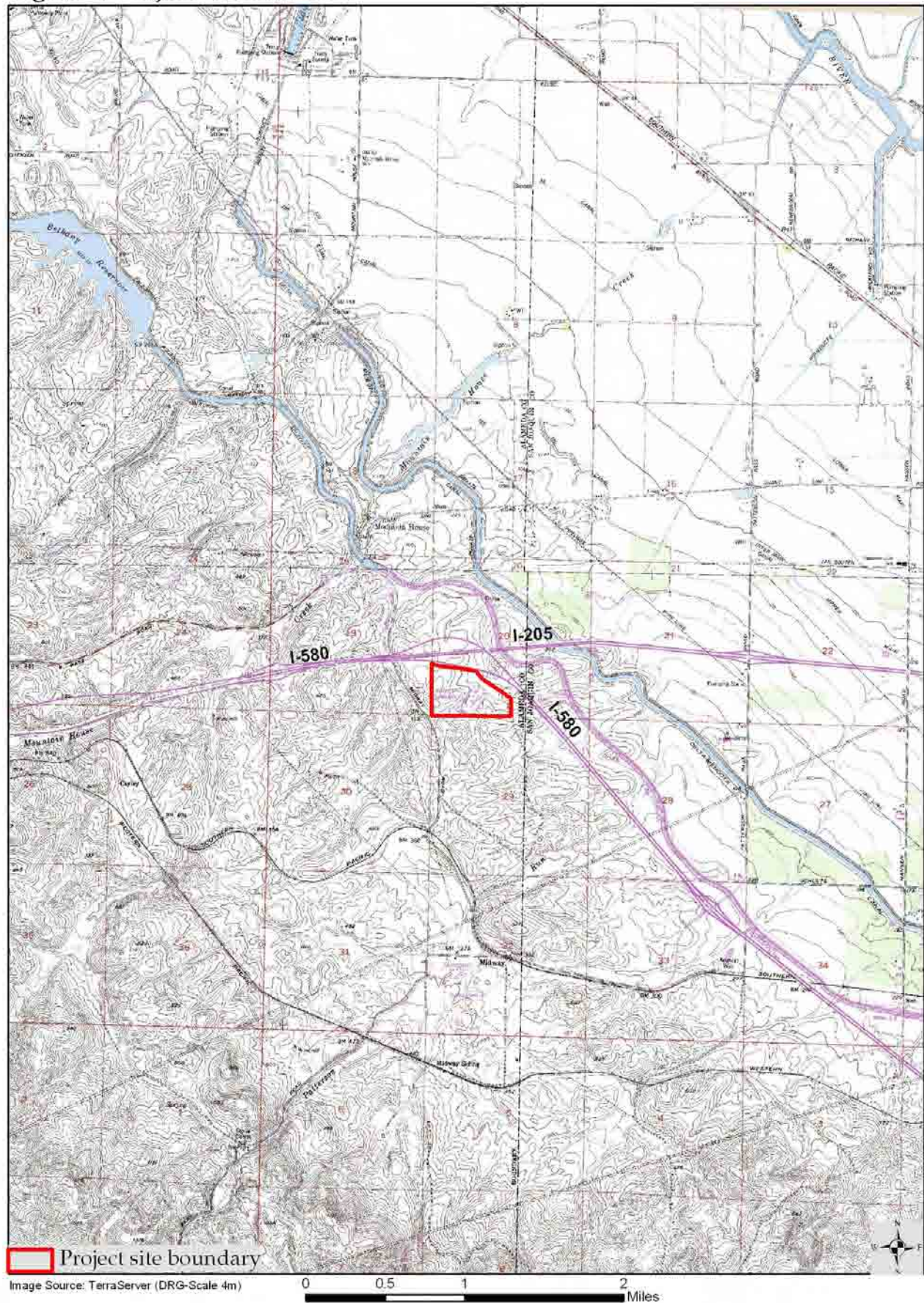
Database Search and Literature Review

The latest version of the California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDDB) was reviewed for the project area. The intent of the database review was to determine the closest documented occurrences of CRLF to the project site. Additionally, the *Recovery Plan for the California Red-Legged Frog* (USFWS 2002) and other literature pertaining to the distribution and life history of the CRLF were reviewed.

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 CRLF aquatic and upland 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. Additionally, windshield surveys of surrounding areas were conducted and available aerial photography was reviewed.

Figure 1: Project Site Location



(IV) OVERVIEW OF CRLF BIOLOGY

The CRLF occurs from sea level to elevations of 1,500 meters (5,200 feet). Breeding occurs in streams, deep pools, backwaters within streams and creeks, ponds, marshes, sag ponds, dune ponds, lagoons, and stock ponds. Breeding adults are often associated with deep (greater than 0.7 meter [2 feet]) still or slow moving water and dense, shrubby riparian or emergent vegetation (Hayes and Jennings 1988), but frogs have been observed in shallow sections of streams and ponds that are devoid of vegetative cover. The species breeds during the winter and early spring from as early as late November through April and May. CRLF larvae remain in breeding ponds until metamorphosis in the summer months (Storer 1925; Wright and Wright 1949). The species also utilizes non-aquatic habitats for refuge and dispersal. The species is known to rest and feed in riparian vegetation and it is believed that the moisture and cover of the riparian zone provides foraging habitat and facilitates dispersal. The species has also been documented dispersing through areas with sparse vegetative cover and dispersal patterns are considered to be dependent on habitat availability and environmental conditions (N. Scott and G. Rathbun *in litt.* 1998).

(V) RESULTS OF CRLF ASSESSMENT

ELEMENT 1. Is the project site within the current or historic range of the CRLF?

The project site is located within the current and historic range of the CRLF (USFWS 2002), but is not located within a designated Critical Habitat unit (USFWS 2006).

ELEMENT 2. Are there known records of CRLF at the site or within a 1-mile radius of the site?

Surveys for CRLF have not been conducted on the project site and the presence of the species is unknown. As shown in **Figure 2, Documented CRLF Occurrences**, the CNDDDB contains multiple records of CRLF in the project region and three occurrences within 1 mile of the project site. Based on the CNDDDB, the closest documented occurrence of CRLF to the project site is approximately 0.4 mile to the north. This occurrence (CNDDDB Occurrence #667) was documented in 2002 within a wetland (with an excavated deep channel) immediately to the north of the California aqueduct.¹ Based on aerial photography, the wetland/channel appears to drain under the California Aqueduct and to potentially have a hydrologic connection to the onsite seasonal pond. Other documented occurrences of CRLF within 1 mile of project site occur 0.9 mile to the northwest (CNDDDB Occurrence #821) and 0.9 mile to the southeast (CNDDDB Occurrence #758). These occurrences do not have a direct hydrologic connection to the project site and are separated from the project site by the California aqueduct or I-580. However, based on aerial photography a potential movement route (which includes traversing approximately 1 mile of upland habitat) appears to be present between Occurrence #821 and the project site.

ELEMENT 3. What are the habitats within the project site and within 1 mile 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

¹ According to the CNDDDB, CRLF was not observed at the location during subsequent surveys conducted in 2003 and 2004.

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**.

California Annual Grassland

The project site is dominated by annual, non-native grasses. The dominant grass species present are soft chess (*Bromus hordeaceus*) and riggut 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. Similar 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.

Figure 2: Documented CRLF Occurrences

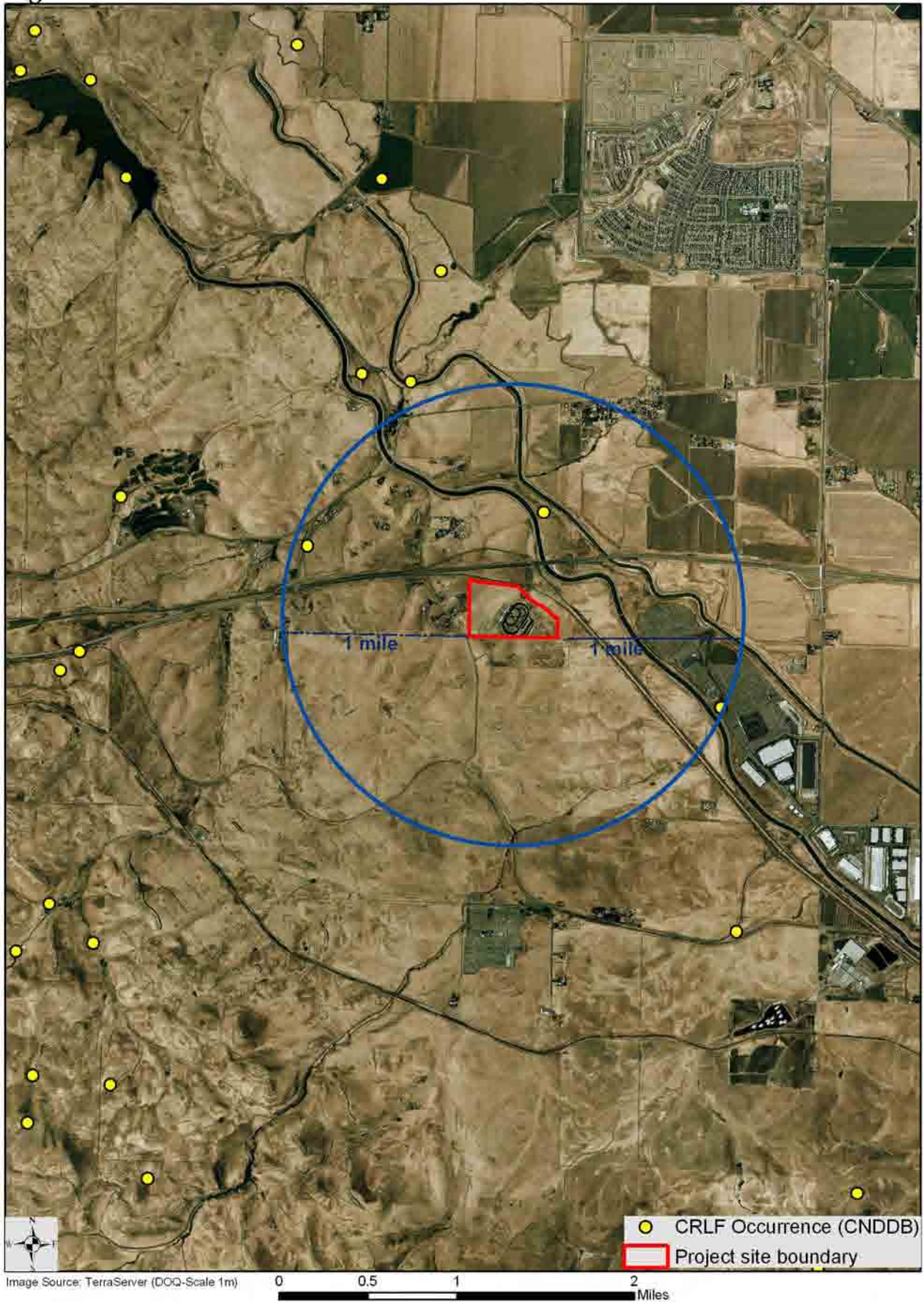


Figure 3: Plant Communities and Land Uses



Image Source: USDA 2006 (DOQ-Scale 1m)

(VI) CONCLUSIONS

The project site is within the range of the CRLF and the closest documented occurrence of the species is approximately 0.4 mile north of the project site. Based on aerial photography, the wetland/channel associated with this occurrence appears to have a hydrologic connection to the onsite seasonal detention pond. The seasonal detention pond on the project site provides apparently suitable CRLF breeding habitat. The pond was dry at the time of the field survey conducted on July 11, 2007, but given the presence of cattails around the pond's outer margin, the pond likely had recently dried. As such, and given that it was a below average rainfall year, it is reasonable to assume that the pond generally holds water for sufficient duration to facilitate CRLF breeding and tadpole metamorphosis. As the pond is seasonal (and apparently isolated from perennial water), it is not expected to contain known predators of CRLF such as bullfrogs (*Rana catesbeiana*) or centrarchid fishes (i.e., bass, perch, sunfish). The suitability of the pond for CRLF is further enhanced by the small cluster of adjacent willow trees, which provides potential refuge habitat for CRLF during periods when the pond is dry. The grasslands on the project site contain abundant ground squirrel burrows, which also provide potential refuge habitat for CRLF during dry periods. Potential opportunities for CRLF to disperse onto or from the project site are present given the undeveloped condition of the surrounding area and neighboring CRLF occurrences. Therefore, given the above, CRLF has a high potential to occupy the seasonal detention pond and to use surrounding upland refuge habitat.

REFERENCES

- California Department of Fish and Game, California Natural Diversity Data Base. 2006. Records of Occurrence for Midday, Byron Hot Springs, Clifton Court Forebay, Union Island, Tracy, Lone Tree Creek, Ceder Mountain, Mendenhall Springs, and Altamont U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute quadrangle maps
- Federal Register / Vol. 71, No. 71 / April 13, 2006. Designation of Critical Habitat for the California Red-Legged Frog; Final Rule
- Hayes, M.P. and M.R. Jennings. 1988. *Habitat correlates of distribution of the California red-legged frog (Rana aurora draytonii) and the foothill yellow-legged frog (Rana boylei)*: Implications for management.
- Jennings, M. 1998. Personal Communication as referenced in the *Recovery Plan for the California Red-Legged Frog* (USFWS 2002). Biological Resources Division, U.S. Geological Survey, Piedras Blancas Field Station of the Western Ecological Research Center, San Simeon, California.
- Scott, N. G. and Rathbun 1998. Comments on working draft of California Red-legged Frog Recovery Plan.
- Stebbins, R.C. 1985. *A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians*. Second edition, revised. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MS.
- Storer, T.1925. A synopsis of the Amphibia of California. University of California Publications in Zoology 27:1-342.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2002. *Recovery Plan for the California Red-Legged Frog (Rana aurora draytonii)*.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2005. *Guidance on Site Assessments and Field Surveys for the California Red-legged Frog*.
- Wright, A.H. and A.A. Wright. 1949. Handbook of frogs and toads of the United States and Canada. Third Edition. Comstock Publishing Company, Ithaca, New York. xii+640 pp.

APPENDIX A – SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1: Seasonal Pond; east view



Photo 2: Seasonal Pond; west view



Photo 3: Annual grassland; east view



Photo 4: Annual grassland parking area, pond in background; view northeast



Photo 5: Small mammal burrow



APPENDIX B – CRLF Habitat Site Assessment Data Sheet

Appendix D.
California Red-legged Frog Habitat Site Assessment Data Sheet

Site Assessment reviewed by _____
(FWS Field Office) (date) (biologist)

Date of Site Assessment: 07/11/07
(mm/dd/yyyy)

Site Assessment Biologists: Phillips, Joshua _____
(Last name) (first name) (Last name) (first name)

_____ _____
(Last name) (first name) (Last name) (first name)

Site Location: Eastern Alameda County, Altamont Motorsports Park, Altamont, CA
(County, General location name, UTM Coordinates or Lat./Long. or T-R-S).

****ATTACH A MAP** (include habitat types, important features, and species locations)**

Proposed project name: Altamont Motorsports Park Rezoning and Infrastructure Improvements
Brief description of proposed action:

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).

- 1) Is this site within the current or historic range of the CRF (circle one)? **YES** NO
- 2) Are there known records of CRF within 1.6 km (1 mi) of the site (circle one)? **YES** NO
If yes, attach a list of all known CRF records with a map showing all locations.

GENERAL AQUATIC HABITAT CHARACTERIZATION
(if multiple ponds or streams are within the proposed action area, fill out one data sheet for each)

POND:

Size: approx. 200 x 75 feet Maximum depth: approx. 3-4 feet

Vegetation: emergent, overhanging, dominant species: small willow area, a single cottonwood, and cattails

Substrate: Dirt

Perennial or **Ephemeral** (circle one). If ephemeral, date it goes dry: Appeared to have recently dried as of July 11, 2007

Appendix D.
California Red-legged Frog Habitat Site Assessment Data Sheet

STREAM:

Bank full width: _____

Depth at bank full: _____

Stream gradient: _____

Are there pools (circle one)? YES NO

If yes,

Size of stream pools: _____

Maximum depth of stream pools: _____

Characterize non-pool habitat: run, riffle, glide, other: _____

Vegetation: emergent, overhanging, dominant species: _____

Substrate: _____

Bank description: _____

Perennial or Ephemeral (*circle one*). If ephemeral, date it goes dry: _____

Other aquatic habitat characteristics, species observations, drawings, or comments:

See report

Necessary Attachments:

1. All field notes and other supporting documents
2. Site photographs

Maps with important habitat features and species location