

Hoods Creek Bridge Replacement

East of Farmington on State Route 4

10-STA-4-7.1/7.4

10-1H230/1020000178

State Clearinghouse Number 2026020519

Initial Study with Mitigated Negative Declaration

Volume 1 of 2



Prepared by the
State of California Department of Transportation

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General Information About This Document

Document prepared by: Alexandros Xides, Environmental Scientist

The Initial Study circulated for 32 days between February 13, 2026, and March 16, 2026, for state agencies and 30 days between February 13, 2026, and March 14, 2026, for the general public. Comments received during this period are included in Appendix B. Elsewhere, language has been added throughout the document to indicate where a change has been made since the circulation of the draft environmental document. Minor editorial changes and clarifications have not been so indicated.

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Replacing Hoods Creek Bridge on State Route 4 from post miles 7.1 to 7.4 in
Stanislaus County

**INITIAL STUDY
with Mitigated Negative Declaration**

Submitted Pursuant to: (State) Division 13, California Public Resources Code

THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Department of Transportation
and
Responsible Agency: California Transportation Commission

C. Scott Guidi

C. Scott Guidi
Office Chief, District 10 Environmental Compliance
California Department of Transportation
CEQA Lead Agency

05/19/2026

Date

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Mitigated Negative Declaration

Pursuant to: Division 13, Public Resources Code

State Clearinghouse Number: 2026020519

District-County-Route-Post Mile: 10-STA-4-7.1/7.4

EA/Project Number: 10-1H230 and Project ID Number 1020000178

Project Description

The project proposes to remove and replace the existing Hoods Creek Bridge along State Route 4 in Stanislaus County at Post Mile 7.28. The project scope of work includes raising the roadway profile for the proposed bridge, roadway widening with standard shoulders, and installing guard rail and new culverts from post mile 7.1 to 7.4. The proposed improvements include right-of-way acquisition, temporary construction easements, ground disturbance, work in channel, and vegetation removal.

Determination

An Initial Study has been prepared by Caltrans District 10. On the basis of this study, it is determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the environment for the following reasons:

The project will have no effect on aesthetics, air quality, energy, geology and soils, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation, utilities and service systems, and wildfire.

The project will have less than significant effects to agricultural resources, cultural resources, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous waste, and tribal cultural resources.

With the following mitigation measures incorporated, the project will have less than significant effects to biological resources.

- **BIO-1: Compensatory Mitigation – Waters of the United States.**

Compensatory mitigation will be required under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act for the estimated loss of 62.92 square feet (0.001-acre) of other waters of the United States. Compensatory mitigation will also be required under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act or Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act for the estimated loss of 235.94 square feet (0.005-acre) of isolated wetlands qualifying as waters of the State of California. Compensatory mitigation is expected to be accomplished through participation in the United States Army Corps of Engineers Sacramento Office and National Fish and Wildlife Federation's in-lieu fees program.

- **BIO-6: Compensatory Mitigation – California Tiger Salamander.**
Compensatory mitigation will be required for the total loss of 4.28 acres of California tiger salamander upland habitat due to significant impacts resulting from permanent fill and the temporary detour alignment during construction. Impacts will be compensated by acquiring 5.02 acre-credits from a United State Fish and Wildlife Service-approved mitigation bank. The loss of 0.16-acre from permanent fill and 0.58-acre from permanent impacts from the temporary detour alignment will be compensated at a 2:1 ratio (1.48 acre-credits). Temporary impacts to 3.54 acres of upland habitat from the detour alignment will be compensated at a 1:1 ratio (3.54 acre-credits).

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05/19/2026

Date

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Chapter 1 Proposed Project

1.1 Introduction

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (known as CEQA) and the lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (known as NEPA). The proposed project will take place at Hoods Creek Bridge, between post miles 7.1 to 7.4 on State Route 4 in Stanislaus County. At the project location, State Route 4 is a two-lane conventional freeway.

The proposed project will replace an existing bridge that currently experiences bridge scour. Bridge scour occurs when fast-moving water from storms or floods erode the soil and sediment around bridge foundations and expose the bridge's footings. Over time, this can potentially lead to bridge failure.

This project was amended into the 2022 State Highway Operation and Protection Program with funding under the 201.111 Bridge Program in the 2026/2027 fiscal year.

1.2 Purpose and Need

1.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this project is to improve the structural integrity and address the nonstandard condition of Hoods Creek Bridge (Bridge Number 38-0041) on State Route 4.

1.2.2 Need

The project is needed due to the poor structural integrity, excessive bridge scouring, recurring flooding, and nonstandard conditions of Hoods Creek Bridge, as identified in the Structure Maintenance and Investigations Bridge Inspection Report dated March 4, 2020.

1.3 Project Description

The project proposes to remove and replace the existing Hoods Creek Bridge along State Route 4 in Stanislaus County at Post Mile 7.28. The project scope of work includes raising the roadway profile for the proposed bridge, roadway widening with standard shoulders, and installing guard rail and new culverts from Post Mile 7.1 to 7.4. The proposed improvements include right-of-way

acquisition, temporary construction easements, ground disturbance, work in channel, and vegetation removal.

Permanent right-of-way acquisition will be required to widen the bridge and adjacent roadway at the approach and departure of the bridge. Temporary construction easements will be necessary for construction and staging purposes.

Figure 1-1 Project Vicinity Map

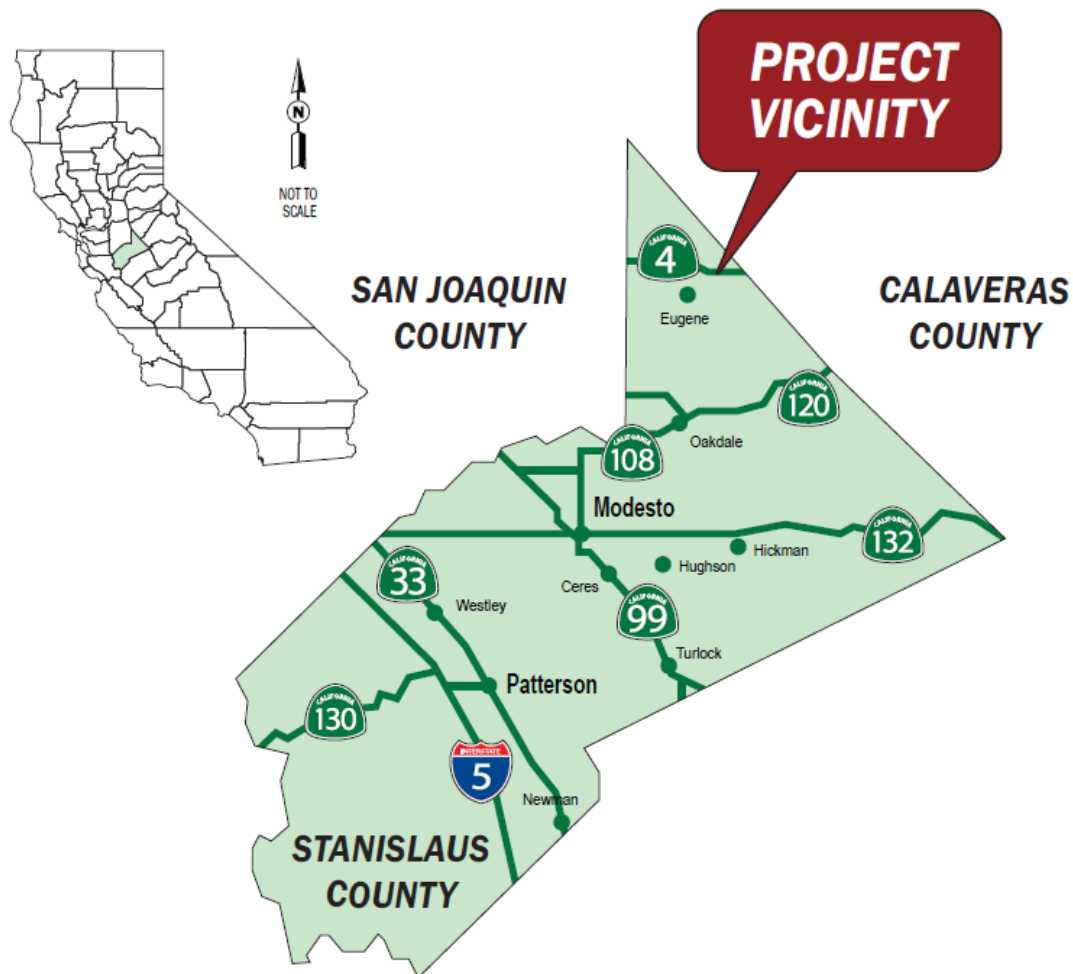
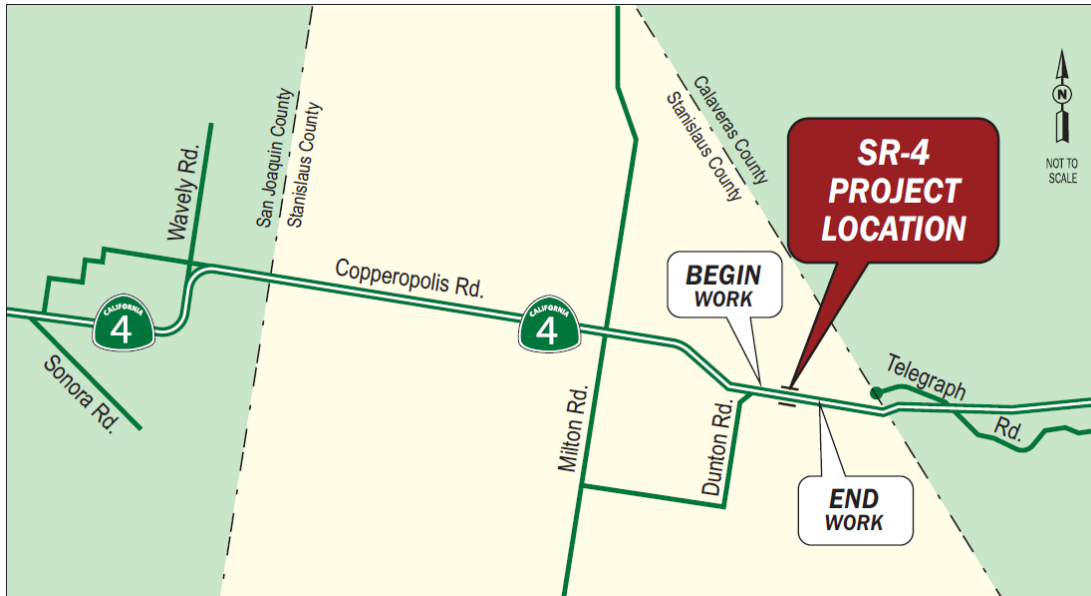


Figure 1-2 Project Location Map



1.4 Project Alternatives

There is one Build Alternative and one No-Build Alternative being considered for the proposed project.

1.4.1 Build Alternatives

The Build Alternative will involve removing and replacing the existing Hoods Creek Bridge (Bridge Number 38-0041). The bridge will be widened to accommodate standard 8-foot shoulders, and the profile of the bridge will be raised. The roadway adjacent to the bridge will be widened and raised to conform to the approach and departure sides of the bridge.

The bridge replacement will be constructed in the same location as the existing Hoods Creek Bridge. A temporary roadway alignment and temporary stream crossing will be constructed on the north side of the existing State Route 4, to detour traffic while the existing Hoods Creek Bridge is being demolished and reconstructed. Temporary construction easements will be necessary for construction of the detour. The temporary alignment will consist of two 12-foot lanes with 4-foot shoulders and provide two-way traffic control. The temporary alignment will be demolished after completion of the bridge replacement.

Ten (10) 6-foot diameter culverts will be required for the temporary detour bridge alignment based on the Hydraulic Recommendation. One (1) culvert located west of Hoods Creek along the existing State Route 4 alignment will be removed and four (4) 3-foot diameter new culverts will be installed. The

roadway profile will be modified (raised) within the project limits to include the new culverts on the west end. Steep and disturbed areas will be treated with aggressive permanent erosion control measures.

This project contains a number of standardized project measures that are used on most, if not all, Caltrans projects and were not developed in response to any specific environmental impact resulting from the proposed project. These measures are listed later in this chapter under “Standard Measures and Best Management Practices Included in All Build Alternatives.”

1.4.2 No-Build (No-Action) Alternative

The No-Build Alternative will leave Hoods Creek Bridge in its current state, with poor scour condition and recurring flooding. As such, it will not address the purpose or need of the project.

1.5 Identification of a Preferred Alternative

This section was added after the draft environmental document completed public circulation. The Build Alternative has been identified as the preferred alternative, as the No-Build Alternative would not address the scour condition of Hoods Creek Bridge or the recurring flooding at the project location, and would not address the purpose or need of the project.

1.6 Standard Measures and Best Management Practices Included in All Build Alternatives

The following Best Management Practices are anticipated to be implemented on the project, where applicable. The final list of Best Management Practices will be submitted by the contractor and approved for inclusion in the construction contract by Caltrans later in the project design phase as part of the preparation of a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan or Water Pollution Control Plan.

- Spill Prevention and Control (Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual WM-4)
- Material Management (Material Delivery, Use, Storage, and Stockpiles; Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual WM-1 through WM-4)
- Waste Management (Solid, Hazardous, Concrete, Sanitary/Septic Wastes, Contaminated Soils; Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual WM-5 through WM-10)

- Vehicle and Equipment Cleaning, Fueling, and Maintenance (Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual NS-8 through NS-10)
- Material and Equipment Use Over Water (Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual NS-13)
- Structure Removal Over or Adjacent to Water (Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual NS-15)
- Paving, Sealing, Sawing, Grooving and Grinding Activities (Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual NS-3)
- Concrete Curing and Finishing (Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual NS-12)
- Temporary Soil Stabilization (Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual SS-1 through SS-10)
- Temporary Sediment Control (Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual SC-1 through SC-10)
- Temporary Tracking Control (Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual TC-1 through TC-3)
- Temporary Concrete Washouts (Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual WM-8)
- Illicit Connection/Illegal Discharge Detection and Reporting (Caltrans 2025 Best Management Practices Manual NS-6)

The following measures from the 2025 Caltrans Standard Specifications will also be implemented in the project, where applicable:

- Section 7-1.02K(6)(j)(ii): Lead Compliance Plan
- Section 7-1.02M: Fire Prevention Procedures
- Section 10-5: Dust Control
- Section 13: Water Pollution Control
- Section 13-4.03B: Spill Prevention and Control
- Section 13-4.03E(3): Vehicle and Equipment Cleaning
- Section 14-7.03: Discovery of Unanticipated Paleontological Resources
- Section 14-8: Noise and Vibration

- Section 14-9.02: Air Pollution Control
- Section 14-11.12: Removal of Yellow Traffic Stripe and Pavement Marking with Hazardous Waste Residue
- Section 14-11.13: Disturbance of Existing Paint Systems on Bridges
- Section 17-2.03: Clearing Vegetation
- Section 21-2.02F: Seed for Erosion Control

1.7 Discussion of the NEPA Categorical Exclusion

This document contains information regarding compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other state laws and regulations. Separate environmental documentation, supporting a Categorical Exclusion determination, will be prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. When needed for clarity, or as required by CEQA, this document may contain references to federal laws and/or regulations (CEQA, for example, requires consideration of adverse effects on species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—that is, species protected by the Federal Endangered Species Act).

1.8 Permits and Approvals Needed

The following permits, licenses, agreements, and certifications are required for project construction:

Agency	Permit/Approval	Status
Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board	Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification	The permit will be obtained during the design phase of the project.
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Clean Water Act Section 404 Nationwide Verification	The permit will be obtained during the design phase of the project.
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	California Fish and Game Code Section 2081 Incidental Take Permit	The permit will be obtained during the design phase of the project.

Agency	Permit/Approval	Status
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	California Fish and Game Code Section 1600 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement	The permit will be obtained during the design phase of the project.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Endangered Species Act Section 7 Formal Consultation: Biological Opinion	The Biological Opinion was obtained on May 14, 2026.

Chapter 2 CEQA Evaluation

2.1 CEQA Environmental Checklist

This checklist identifies physical, biological, social, and economic factors that might be affected by the proposed project. Potential impact determinations include Significant and Unavoidable Impact, Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated, Less Than Significant Impact, and No Impact. In many cases, background studies performed in connection with a project will indicate that there are no impacts to a particular resource. A “No Impact” answer reflects this determination. The questions in this checklist are intended to encourage the thoughtful assessment of impacts and do not represent thresholds of significance.

Project features, which can include both design elements of the project and standardized measures that are applied to all or most Caltrans projects such as Best Management Practices and measures included in the Standard Plans and Specifications or as Standard Special Provisions, are considered to be an integral part of the project and have been considered prior to any significance determinations documented below.

“No Impact” determinations in each section are based on the scope, description, and location of the proposed project as well as the appropriate technical report (bound separately in Volume 2), and no further discussion is included in this document.

2.1.1 Aesthetics

Considering the information in the Visual Impact Assessment Questionnaire dated November 13, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	No Impact
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?	No Impact

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics
c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from a publicly accessible vantage point.) If the project is in an urbanized area, will the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?	No Impact
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which will adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	No Impact

2.1.2 Agriculture and Forestry Resources

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment Project; and the forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

Considering the information in the Community Impact Assessment Memorandum dated December 2, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Agriculture and Forest Resources
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?	No Impact

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Agriculture and Forest Resources
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	Less than Significant Impact
c) Conflict with existing zoning, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g))?	No Impact
d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	No Impact
e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	No Impact

Affected Environment

The proposed project takes place in a rural, unincorporated area in the northern region of Stanislaus County along State Route 4.

The surrounding area is a flat grassland, categorized under the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program as grazing land. The area directly north of the project has mixed enrollment in the Williamson Act, while the area south is non-prime agricultural land not enrolled in the Williamson Act.

In the wider vicinity, there are livestock facilities categorized under the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program as confined animal agriculture. The nearest of these facilities is 0.2 miles west of the project. Further northwest of these livestock facilities is a small number of rural residential properties. These properties are located north of the intersection of State Route 4 and Dunton Road, approximately 0.6 miles west of the project. South of this intersection, over 1 mile from the project, is a 50-acre area categorized as Farmland of Local Importance, along with additional confined animal agriculture facilities.

The project area does not include any forest land or timberland that will be impacted by the permanent right-of-way acquisition or temporary construction impacts of the proposed project.

Environmental Consequences

The proposed project will require an estimated 2.87 acres of permanent right-of-way acquisition to accommodate raising the bridge and roadway profile, as well as widen their embankments and abutments. The project will acquire 1.37 acres from the parcel north of State Route 4 and 1.50 acres from the parcel to the south. These parcels are a total of 672.67 acres and 1,257.17 acres respectively, so this proposed right-of-way take will represent 0.2% or less of the total area for either of these adjacent parcels. Additionally, the land that will be acquired for construction of the project does not qualify as Prime or Unique Farmland or as Farmland of Local or Statewide Importance.

The project will also involve temporary construction easements at the east end of the project length to build up the roadway embankment, as well as north of Hoods Creek Bridge to build the temporary detour alignment and stream crossing. The temporary construction easements will include 1.08 acres from the parcel to the north and 0.07-acre from the parcel to the south. This temporary alignment will be demolished after construction is completed. The area temporarily affected by construction is primarily used for livestock grazing and will be restored and revegetated per the avoidance and minimization measure listed below. The temporary construction easements will not permanently affect the agricultural use or zoning of these properties, and the impact is considered less than significant.

A Farmland Conversion Impact Rating was calculated using Form AD-1006 produced by the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Land use conversion impacts to adjacent parcels were evaluated by a list of 12 Site Assessment Criteria, resulting in scores of 58 for the north and 53 for the south parcel. These scores both fall below the threshold of 60 and following the guidance in the Caltrans Standard Environmental Reference, Chapter 23, the impacts do not require formal evaluation by NRCS and are considered less than significant.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following measure will minimize less than significant impacts to agricultural resources. A full description of the measure is also included in Appendix B of this document.

- BIO-5: Restore and Revegetate Temporarily Disturbed Areas Onsite.

2.1.3 Air Quality

Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations.

Considering the information in the Air Quality Memorandum dated November 3, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Air Quality
a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?	No Impact
b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard?	No Impact
c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?	No Impact
d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?	No Impact

2.1.4 Biological Resources

Considering the information in the Natural Environment Study dated November 6, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries?	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	Less Than Significant Impact

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?	No Impact
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	No Impact
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	No Impact

Affected Environment

The proposed project is located within the eastern San Joaquin Valley portion of the California Central Valley, in Stanislaus County. The surrounding area is mostly flat grassland near sea level, which is used for livestock grazing and animal agriculture. The area has a Mediterranean climate characterized by hot, dry summers and cool, moist winters, with most rainfall occurring between November and April.

Hoods Creek is a tributary of the Farmington Flood Control Basin, Rock Creek, Little John's Creek, French Camp Slough, and the San Joaquin River, and is located between two reservoir systems. The Orvis Dam reservoir is located approximately 1.7 stream-miles upstream, and the dam at the Farmington Flood Control Basin is located downstream, approximately 7.8 miles southwest. The Farmington Flood Control Basin is also planned by the San Joaquin Council of Governments to be repurposed from flood protection to a long-term water storage facility.

The project area was surveyed by Caltrans biologists on seven dates between 2021 and 2024 to identify biological inventory, observe hydrologic features, delineate jurisdictional waters, and perform botanical surveys. Field surveys used resource-agency approved protocol methods where appropriate.

Potentially Jurisdictional Waters

Wetlands were preliminarily delineated within the project area, but they lack a continuous surface connection to a relatively permanent waterbody. As such, they do not qualify as waters of the United States, though they do qualify as non-federal waters of the State of California. The Caltrans biologist preliminarily identified 0.46-acre of potentially jurisdictional other waters of the United States and 0.005-acre of non-federal jurisdictional waters of the State of California in the area.

Hoods Creek in the project area is a late-intermittent stream, with site visits in January 2021 and December 2023 indicating that it continues to flow and support pools of water under and upstream of the bridge later into summer. The project area also includes stormwater drainage facilities, such as ditches and highway cross culverts. However, the area does not support vernal pools or other seasonal wetlands. There is also no riparian vegetation in the project footprint.

Essential Fish Habitat

The Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Management Act defines Essential Fish Habitat as waters and substrate determined to be necessary for fish spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth. Essential Fish Habitat for Chinook salmon does not occur in the project area. Therefore, the project will not require consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Special-Status Plants

One special-status plant species was surveyed for presence in the project area: Colusa grass. However, the project is outside the range of the species, and the project area also does not include any vernal pools or other seasonal wetlands that will support the species. No special-status plant species were detected during botanical surveys in March 2024, and none are expected to occur within the project area.

Invasive Species

Several invasive plant species were identified during botanical surveys in March 2024, including wild oat, soft chess, yellow star thistle, Bermuda grass, curly dock, black locust, and ripgut brome. Most of these species are annual grasses and forbs that commonly occur as ruderal vegetation along disturbed roadside areas and are rated by the California Invasive Plant Council as plants of “limited” or “moderate” invasiveness.

Bullfrogs, an invasive animal species, were identified during site visits in January and March of 2021 in the aquatic habitat of Hoods Creek, within the project area. The area also serves as suitable breeding habitat for bullfrogs, which serve as potential predators of other species.

California Tiger Salamander

The Central California Distinct Population Segment of the California tiger salamander is listed as “threatened” under the Federal Endangered Species Act. The project area does not include any designated critical habitat for the California tiger salamander, and none of the species were observed during field visits between December 2023 and March 2024.

While the project is within the current and historical range of this population segment, and there is a single recorded occurrence of the species 3.1 miles away, the project area has no suitable aquatic breeding habitat for California tiger salamander due to the presence of predatory bullfrogs and the area’s high exposure to sunlight and warm temperatures. However, there is potential aquatic habitat located 1.24 miles from the project. This means that a total of 4.28 acres of the grasslands in the project area are considered potential upland habitat for the species.

Northwestern Pond Turtle

The northwestern pond turtle is considered a “Species of Concern” by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and is proposed to be listed as “threatened” under the Federal Endangered Species Act. The project is within the current range of the species. Hoods Creek could serve as potential aquatic foraging and dispersal habitat for the species, and the surrounding area includes potential upland habitat for breeding, dispersal, or overwintering. However, no northwestern pond turtles were observed in field visits between December 2023 and March 2024 or during the monitoring and surveys associated with the archaeological investigation performed in April 2025.

The nearest recorded observation of the species was 8.8 miles south of the project, in 1993. All areas below the top of the bank of Hoods Creek are considered potential aquatic habitat for northwestern pond turtles (totaling 0.79-acre), and all areas within 200 feet of this aquatic habitat are considered potential upland habitat (totaling 1.84 acres).

Western Spadefoot

The western spadefoot is considered a “Species of Concern” by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and is proposed to be listed as “threatened” under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Hoods Creek in the project area is not suitable aquatic breeding habitat for the species as the water flows during the species’ reproductive season.

However, there are potential breeding pools within 1,000 feet of the project area. Uplands within 200 feet of these potential breeding pools are considered as potentially occupied by adult spadefoot. The project area contains 0.68-acre of potential upland habitat for spadefoot.

No life stages of the species were observed during site visits between December 2023 and March 2024. They also were not encountered during monitoring and surveys associated with archaeological excavation activities performed in April 2025. The nearest recorded observation was 2.8 miles northwest of the project, in 1981.

Migratory Birds and Raptors

Nesting migratory birds and raptors protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act may potentially nest on the ground, within shrubs or trees, or on structures between February 1 and September 30. Three black locust trees occur in the project vicinity, though no nests were observed. However, swallow mud nests were observed on the existing Hoods Creek Bridge during surveys between December 2023 and March 2024.

Western Burrowing Owl

The following language has been added after circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Western burrowing owl is a California Species of Special Concern. Suitable habitat for the species may occur in open, dry annual or perennial grasslands, deserts, and scrublands characterized by low-growing vegetation. The species is dependent upon burrowing mammals, such as the California ground squirrel, for its burrows. Biological surveys conducted for the Natural Environment Study occurred between January 2021 and August 2024, including survey effort during the western burrowing owl nesting season, did not detect western burrowing owl individuals, colonies, or nesting sites within or immediately adjacent to the project area. Furthermore, intensive biological survey effort occurred within 1,000 feet of the project area also did not detect western burrowing owl within the vicinity of project Action Area. Weekly drive-by surveys of the project site by the assigned biologist did not detect western burrowing owl within the vicinity of State Route 4 and Hoods Creek.

Crotch's Bumble Bee

The following language has been added after circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Crotch's bumble bee is a California Endangered Species Act Candidate species. The species is not recorded in the California Natural Diversity Database list of sensitive species for the Bachelor Valley U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute quadrangle that encompasses the project area. The closest recorded occurrence of Crotch's bumble bee occurs near the City of Lodi, over 32 miles northwest of the project Action Area. However, the project

falls within the range of Crotch's bumble bee and potential foraging and nesting habitat occur within the project area.

Roosting Bats

Special-status and non-special status bat species may roost in structures or trees, and some may use swallow nests for roosting as well. However, the existing bridge lacks expansion joints, longitudinal joints, or other crevice-type features that will be suitable as day roosting habitat for bats. As such, the bridge has very low potential to host day roosts for bats. The bridge structure could support night roosting, but there was no evidence of roosting in the structure, swallow nests, or black locust trees during site visits between December 2023 and March 2024.

Other Special-Status Wildlife Species

Other special-status wildlife species considered for analysis in the Natural Environment Study include monarch butterfly, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, vernal pool fairy shrimp, and vernal pool tadpole shrimp. However, the project area is either outside the range of these species or lacks suitable habitat for them.

Fish Passage and Wildlife Connectivity

The existing Hoods Creek Bridge does not represent a barrier to fish passage. However, due to fish passage issues associated with the dam at Farmington Flood Control Basin, native anadromous fish species like salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon are not expected to be able to access this segment of Hoods Creek. There is no Essential Fish Habitat for Chinook salmon or other anadromous fish within the project area.

Hoods Creek and the reservoir at Orvis Dam may support common warm-water, non-anadromous fish species such as mosquitofish, black bullhead, white catfish, carp, and largemouth bass. However, no special-status fish species were observed or are expected, and the project will not result in any permanent impediment to fish passage through the area.

Habitats for common terrestrial wildlife species occur within and adjacent to the project footprint. The highway system, local roads, and agricultural uses in the vicinity are the primary barriers to terrestrial wildlife movement in the region. However, the project does not propose any features that will permanently impede wildlife movement or connectivity, as the detour alignment and indirect disturbances of construction activity will be temporary in nature.

Environmental Consequences

The project will result in permanent and temporary modifications to aquatic and upland habitats, additional structures shading, and other temporary construction impacts. These will potentially include turbidity, contaminants, noise, vibrations, light, or other physical disturbances.

Two reasonably foreseeable effects were considered when assessing potential impacts from the proposed project on California tiger salamander, northwestern pond turtle, western spadefoot, and their respective habitats. The first effect evaluated was the potential for changes in the duration or frequency of habitat inundation or modification that could affect aquatic habitat suitability. The second effect was potential for the project to introduce predators to the area. These reasonably foreseeable effects are discussed alongside other potential impacts for each species below.

Potentially Jurisdictional Waters

The project will result in 62.92 square feet (0.001-acre) of permanent fill below the ordinary high-water mark of Hoods Creek. This will cause potentially significant impacts to jurisdictional other waters of the United States. Additionally, there will be 7,638.61 square feet (0.18-acre) of temporary disturbance to other waters of the United States from dewatering during construction.

The project will also result in 235.94 square feet (0.005-acre) of permanent fill in isolated wetlands qualifying as waters of the State of California, which will be a potentially significant impact. The project will also result in 575.16 square feet (0.01-acre) of permanent fill between the ordinary high-water mark and top of bank.

Compensatory mitigation will be required for 0.001-acre of permanent impacts to potentially jurisdictional other waters of the United States, under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Compensatory mitigation will also be required for the 0.005-acre of permanent impacts to isolated wetlands qualifying as waters of the State of California, under Porter-Cologne Water Quality Act or Section 401 of the Clean Water Act.

A Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification and Section 404 Nationwide Verification will be acquired prior to project construction. A California Fish and Game Code Section 1600 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement will also be acquired prior to construction from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for potential discharge or disturbance of the streambed. Avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures for impacts to potentially jurisdictional waters are included below.

Essential Fish Habitat

As the project contains no Essential Fish Habitat, no impacts are anticipated, and no avoidance or minimization measures are required.

Special-Status Plants

No special-status plants are present in the project area, so no impact is anticipated from the proposed project. No avoidance or minimization measures are required.

Invasive Species

The proposed project may potentially break new ground and encourage the spread of invasive plant species. This is due to shoulder widening and grading, as well as construction and removal of temporary alignments and stream crossings. The project is not expected to introduce or transport invasive animal species. The standard specifications and best management practices to reduce the risk of invasive species propagation are listed above in Section 1.5 of this environmental document.

California Tiger Salamander

Hoods Creek in the project area is unlikely to support aquatic breeding of California tiger salamander, and the project will not impact riparian vegetation, as none is present. The project will also be constructed during a time period where aquatic life stages of the California tiger salamander will not be present. As such, the potential for impacts from aquatic habitat modification, vegetation removal, dewatering, sediment mobilization, contaminants, noise, vibration, lights, and other physical disturbances is considered very low.

However, 4.28 acres of annual grassland in the project area are considered upland habitat and may be occupied by adult or juvenile California tiger salamanders. As such, there is moderate potential for impacts to the species from upland habitat modification. Adjacent to State Route 4, 0.16 acres of upland habitat will be permanently impacted by the widened roadway embankment and bridge abutments. Additionally, 0.58 acres of upland habitat will be permanently impacted by the temporary detour alignment, as the excavation and compaction will permanently destroy burrows in the area even after the temporary detour is removed and the area is revegetated. Finally, the remaining 3.54 acres of upland habitat will be temporarily impacted from contractor access and staging, including the temporary detour alignment, that will cover or trample burrows, but not collapse them entirely.

Two reasonably foreseeable effects were evaluated for their potential to impact the California tiger salamander later in time or at another location. Both were determined to have no potential or very low potential for impact. The project will not change the duration or frequency of aquatic habitat

inundation or affect precipitation or watershed drainage patterns, and no suitable aquatic breeding habitat exists in the project area. Additionally, the project will not introduce additional predators to the area.

Under the Federal Endangered Species Act, the proposed project will be likely to adversely affect the Central California Distinct Population Segment of the California tiger salamander. Formal consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service under Section 7 of the Federal Endangered Species Act will be required.

Under the California Endangered Species Act, the proposed project will result in take of the Central California Distinct Population Segment of the California tiger salamander. Consultation with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be required under Section 2081 of the California Fish and Game Code.

Standard specifications for noise minimization, as listed under Section 1.5 of this environmental document, will apply. Compensatory mitigation measures will be required for permanent and significant impacts to 0.16-acre California tiger salamander upland habitat. Avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures are listed below for California tiger salamander.

Northwestern Pond Turtle

The project area may potentially serve as aquatic foraging and dispersal habitat for the northwestern pond turtle. However, none were detected during the wildlife surveys conducted between December 2023 and March 2024, or during the monitoring and surveys associated with the archaeological investigation performed in April 2025.

Upland habitat may support turtle nesting sites that could be occupied from the beginning of May to the end of August or could support overwintering turtles from November to March. As such, the project has moderate potential for impact to the species. The potential area of temporary impacts to upland habitat is 1.3 acres, with potential permanent impacts to 0.54-acre of upland habitat.

The potential for impacts from vegetation removal, additional structural shade footprint, sediment mobilization, and introduction of contaminants is considered very low. Indirect construction impacts, including noise, vibration, and light, have moderate potential to impact adult pond turtles, but very low potential to impact pond turtle eggs.

Two reasonably foreseeable effects were evaluated for their potential to impact the northwestern pond turtle later in time or at another location. Both were determined to have no potential or very low potential for impact. The project will not affect inundation, precipitation, or drainage patterns in the area

or make aquatic habitat less suitable and will not introduce additional predators to the site.

Under the Federal Endangered Species Act, the proposed project will be likely to adversely affect the northwestern pond turtle. Under the California Endangered Species Act, the proposed project may result in take of the northwestern pond turtle.

Impacts to northwestern pond turtle are considered less than significant and will be avoided and minimized with the implementation of the measures listed below.

Western Spadefoot

Project activities will occur during the aquatic life stages of the western spadefoot. However, Hoods Creek is not suitable for aquatic breeding or rearing habitat for the spadefoot. As such, the likelihood of impacts to spadefoot through aquatic habitat modification, dewatering, water diversion, additional shading, sediment or contaminant mobilization, and physical disturbances are considered very low.

Although suitable upland spadefoot habitat occurs in the project area, direct permanent impacts will be avoided. Contractor access and staging may temporarily affect 347.99 square feet (0.01-acre) area of potential upland habitat. The likelihood of impacts to spadefoot through upland habitat modification is also considered very low.

Two reasonably foreseeable effects were evaluated for their potential to impact the northwestern pond turtle later in time or at another location. Both were determined to have no potential or very low potential for impact. The project will not affect inundation, precipitation, or drainage patterns in the area or make aquatic habitat less suitable and will not introduce additional predators to the site.

Under the Federal Endangered Species Act, the project may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the western spadefoot. Under the California Endangered Species Act, the project will also result in no take of the species. Avoidance and minimization measures are included below.

Nesting Migratory Birds and Raptors

The project is not anticipated to result in significant impacts to migratory birds and raptors, or their nests. Under the California Endangered Species Act, the project will also result in no take. Avoidance and minimization measures are included below.

Western Burrowing Owl

The following language has been added after circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Mammalian burrows that qualify as suitable nesting habitat for western burrowing owl are present in the project area. However, the project is not anticipated to result in significant impacts to the species or their nests. Under the California Endangered Species Act, the project is also anticipated to result in no take. Avoidance and minimization measures are included below.

Crotch's Bumble Bee

The following language has been added after circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

While there are no recorded occurrences of Crotch's bumble bee in the project vicinity, the project falls within the range of Crotch's bumble bee and potential foraging and nesting habitat occur within the project area. The project is not anticipated to result in significant impacts to the species or their hives. Under the California Endangered Species Act, the project is also anticipated to result in no take. Avoidance and minimization measures are included below.

Roosting Bats

The existing Hoods Creek Bridge lacks expansion joints, longitudinal joints, or any other crevice-type features suitable as day-roosting habitat for structures-roosting or crevice-roosting bats. The bridge does potentially provide night-roosting habitat on vertical concrete surfaces. Three black locust trees occur in the project area, though they lack cavities, exfoliating bark, or dense foliage suitable for day-roosting.

No evidence of bat day-roosting, night-roosting, tree-roosting, or use of abandoned swallow nests was detected during site visits conducted between December 2023 and April 2024. However, removal of abandoned swallow nests along Hoods Creek Bridge may result in take of roosting bats. The avoidance and minimization measures listed below will be required to avoid impacts to roosting bats.

Other Special-Status Wildlife

The following special-status species or habitats were also evaluated for potential impacts from the proposed project, including monarch butterfly, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, vernal pool fairy shrimp, vernal pool tadpole

shrimp, and designated critical habitat for the Central California Distinct Population Segments of California tiger salamander and steelhead.

However, due to the project being outside the range of these species, lacking suitable habitat or habitat components in the area, and not harming individuals or altering habitat, it is Caltrans' determination that the proposed project will have no effect on the species or habitats listed above. No avoidance or minimization measures will be required.

Fish Passage and Wildlife Connectivity

The existing Hoods Creek Bridge is not considered a barrier to resident native and non-native non-anadromous fish species. The project will also not result in any modifications to the bridge structure or stream channel that will permanently impede fish passage.

The completed project will also not include any features that will further impede the passage of terrestrial wildlife. Temporary impediments to wildlife passage may result from construction, including physical barriers, construction noise, or visual disturbances. However, the project will not cause any permanent alteration of the baseline terrestrial wildlife movement or connectivity. No avoidance or minimization measures will be required.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Full descriptions of the avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures are included in Appendix B of this document.

Potentially Jurisdictional Waters

The following compensatory mitigation measure will be required for significant impacts to potentially jurisdictional other waters of the United States.

- BIO-1: Compensatory Mitigation – Waters of the United States and the State of California.

The following avoidance and minimization measures will be required for less than significant impacts to potentially jurisdictionally waters.

- BIO-2: Environmentally Sensitive Area Designation.
- BIO-3: Designated Biologist.
- BIO-4: Limited Operation Period – Stream Zone Construction Activities.
- BIO-5: Restore and Revegetate Temporarily Disturbed Areas Onsite.

California Tiger Salamander

The following compensatory mitigation measure will be required for significant impacts to California tiger salamander.

- BIO-6: Compensatory Mitigation – California Tiger Salamander.

The following avoidance and minimization measures will be required for less than significant impacts to California tiger salamander. Measure BIO-8 (Pre-Construction Surveys for California Tiger Salamander) has been added after circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

- BIO-2: Environmentally Sensitive Area Designation.
- BIO-3: Designated Biologist.
- BIO-4: Limited Operation Period – Stream Zone Construction Activities.
- BIO-5: Restore and Revegetate Temporarily Disturbed Areas Onsite.
- BIO-7: Worker Environmental Awareness Training for Construction Personnel.
- BIO-8: Pre-Construction Surveys for California Tiger Salamander.
- BIO-9: Temporary Exclusion Fencing.
- BIO-10: Prevent Entrapment.
- BIO-11: California Tiger Salamander Relocation.
- BIO-12: California Tiger Salamander – Restrict Work During Rain Events.
- BIO-13: Temporary Construction Lighting Minimization.
- BIO-14: Construction Lighting – Color Temperature.

Northwestern Pond Turtle

The following avoidance and minimization measures will be required for less than significant impacts to northwestern pond turtle.

- BIO-2: Environmentally Sensitive Area Designation.
- BIO-3: Designated Biologist.
- BIO-4: Limited Operation Period – Stream Zone Construction Activities.
- BIO-5: Restore and Revegetate Temporarily Disturbed Areas Onsite.

- BIO-14: Construction Lighting – Color Temperature.
- BIO-15: Aquatic Wildlife – Pre-Construction Surveys.
- BIO-16: Aquatic Wildlife – Protective Buffers.
- BIO-17: Aquatic Wildlife – Construction Monitoring.

Western Spadefoot

The following avoidance and minimization measures will be required for less than significant impacts to northwestern pond turtle.

- BIO-2: Environmentally Sensitive Area Designation.
- BIO-3: Designated Biologist.
- BIO-4: Limited Operation Period – Stream Zone Construction Activities.
- BIO-5: Restore and Revegetate Temporarily Disturbed Areas Onsite.
- BIO-14: Construction Lighting – Color Temperature.
- BIO-18: Western Spadefoot – Pre-Construction Surveys.
- BIO-19: Western Spadefoot – Protective Buffers.
- BIO-20: Western Spadefoot – Construction Monitoring.

Nesting Migratory Birds and Raptors

The following avoidance and minimization measures will be required for less than significant impacts to nesting migratory birds and raptors.

- BIO-21: Migratory Birds and Raptors – Pre-Construction Surveys During Nesting Season.
- BIO-22: Migratory Birds and Raptors – Protective Buffers.
- BIO-23: Migratory Birds and Raptors – Construction Monitoring.

Western Burrowing Owl

The following language has been added after circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The following avoidance and minimization measures will be required for less than significant impacts to western burrowing owl.

- BIO-28: Pre-Construction Surveys for Western Burrowing Owl.

Crotch's Bumble Bee

The following language has been added after circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The following avoidance and minimization measures will be required for less than significant impacts to Crotch's bumble bee.

- BIO-29: Pre-Construction Surveys for Crotch's Bumble Bee.

Roosting Bats

The following avoidance and minimization measures will be required for less than significant impacts to roosting bats.

- BIO-24: Roosting Bats Avoidance – Pre-Construction Surveys.
- BIO-25: Roosting Bats Avoidance – Protective Buffers.
- BIO-26: Roosting Bats Avoidance – Construction Monitoring.
- BIO-27: Roosting Bats Avoidance – Bat Roost Management.

2.1.5 Cultural Resources

Considering the information in the Historic Property Survey Report dated November 21, 2025, the Archaeological Survey Report dated July 29, 2025, and the Archaeological Evaluation Report dated July 29, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Cultural Resources
a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?	No Impact
b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?	Less Than Significant Impact
c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?	No Impact

Affected Environment

Cultural resource identification efforts on the project included review of data from the Caltrans Cultural Resources Database, the Central California Information Center at California State University, Stanislaus, and an in-house archival search by Far Western Anthropological Research Group, Inc.

The records search identified several previously recorded resources in the general project vicinity, though only two archaeological sites intersected the project's area of direct impact. An archaeological investigation of the project area confirmed the presence of these two archaeological sites within the area of direct impact.

The following paragraph has been updated after public circulation of the draft environmental document to clarify that only portions of the two archaeological sites were evaluated. Due to the large size of the sites and access restrictions making evaluation of the full site areas infeasible, only the portions of each site that intersected with the project's area of direct impacts were evaluated for their contributions to the historic significance of the sites as a whole. A pedestrian survey of the entire area of potential effect was conducted to confirm the location and condition of the sites. Intensive Phase II subsurface archaeological investigations were also completed in April 2025 where the sites intersected with the project's area of direct impact.

Informational letters for consultation outreach were sent to the Stanislaus County Historical Society and the Stanislaus County Community Development Department. No responses to the informational letters were returned. Caltrans also performed consultation outreach to four Native American Tribes and has since continued coordination with representatives of two Tribes about the construction schedule and monitoring procedures. Additional information about Tribal outreach is included in Section 2.1.8 and Chapter 3 of this environmental document. Tribal consultation remains ongoing.

Environmental Consequences

The project area of potential effect includes the Hoods Creek Bridge (Bridge Number 38-0041), which was previously determined not eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The only other built-environment resource present in the area of potential effect meets the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Programmatic Agreement criteria for properties exempt from evaluation. As such, the project is expected to have no impacts to built-environment resources.

Subsurface testing was conducted within the portions of the two archaeological sites within the project's area of direct impact, and it was concluded that the evaluated portions do not retain sufficient integrity or data potential to contribute to the site's eligibility for listing in either the National Register of Historic Places or California Register of Historical Resources.

However, the two archaeological properties as a whole are assumed eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for the purposes of this project. This assumption is being made because the large size of the sites and access limitations prevented a full evaluation of the entire sites. Because the sites were not exhaustively tested, there is still potential for unknown buried deposits to exist within untested portions of the sites within the area of direct impact.

The following language has been updated after public circulation of the draft environmental document. Because the project will not diminish the integrity or data potential for the two archaeological sites, Caltrans determined that a Finding of No Adverse Effect (without Standard Conditions) is appropriate for the project. Concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Officer was obtained for this finding on April 8, 2026.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Impacts to the two archaeological sites identified in the project's area of potential effect will be avoided and minimized with the use of the following measures. Full descriptions of the measures are included in Appendix B of this document.

- CU-1: Environmentally Sensitive Area Designation (Cultural).
- CU-2: Environmental Monitoring Area.

2.1.6 Energy

Considering the information in the Energy Analysis Technical Memorandum dated November 21, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Energy
a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources during project construction or operation?	No Impact
b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?	No Impact

2.1.7 Geology and Soils

Considering the scope of the proposed project, the information in the District Preliminary Geotechnical Report dated October 6, 2023, the Paleontological

Identification Report dated November 20, 2025, and the Earthquake Fault Zone mapping produced by the California Department of Conservation, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Geology and Soils
a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving: i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.	No Impact
ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?	No Impact
iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?	No Impact
iv) Landslides?	No Impact
b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?	No Impact
c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that will become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in onsite or offsite landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?	No Impact
d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial risks to life or property?	No Impact
e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste water disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water?	No Impact
f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?	No Impact

2.1.8 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Considering the information in the Climate Change Study dated December 3, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Greenhouse Gas Emissions
a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?	Less Than Significant Impact
b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?	No Impact

Affected Environment

The proposed project is located in a rural, unincorporated area in Stanislaus County, approximately 12 miles north of the City of Oakdale. The project area is agricultural, with the surrounding land consisting of native and nonnative grassland sometimes used for livestock grazing.

State Route 4 in the area connects the City of Stockton, approximately 25 miles west of the project, to the town of Angels Camp located approximately 19.5 miles northeast of the project. State Route 4 is the main transportation route to and through the area for both passenger and commercial vehicles. This segment of State Route 4 has an Annual Average Daily Traffic count of 7,600 vehicles per day. This is relatively low traffic use due to the low population density of the area and the significant distance from any residential or commercial centers.

The Stanislaus Council of Governments is the metropolitan planning organization for Stanislaus County, and guides transportation development. The regional reduction target for the 2022 Regional Transportation Plan produced by the Stanislaus Council of Governments is 16 percent by 2035. The Stanislaus County General Plan Circulation element addresses greenhouse gas emissions in the project area.

Environmental Consequences

The proposed project is non-capacity increasing, as it will not add any travel lanes. As such, it will not lead to any operational increases in greenhouse gas emissions that will conflict with greenhouse emission reduction goals outlined in the 2022 Regional Transportation Plan or General Plan for Stanislaus County.

However, greenhouse gas emissions will be unavoidable during construction. Project construction is expected to generate approximately 183 tons of

carbon dioxide during the 180 working days duration. However, these temporary construction emissions will be minimized with the use of the following measures.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following measures will be implemented for the project to reduce greenhouse emissions and potential climate change impacts from the project. Full descriptions of the measures are also included in Appendix B of this document.

- GHG-1: Limit equipment idling.
- GHG-2: Schedule truck trips.
- GHG-3: Improve fuel efficiency.
- GHG-4: Reduce waste.

2.1.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Considering the information in the Initial Site Assessment dated November 20, 2025, the Community Impact Assessment dated December 2, 2025, and the Climate Change Study dated December 3, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials
a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?	No Impact
b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?	Less Than Significant Impact
c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?	No Impact

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials
d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, will it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?	No Impact
e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, will the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?	No Impact
f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	No Impact
g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?	No Impact

Affected Environment

The proposed project is located in a rural, agricultural area in Stanislaus County, approximately 12 miles north of the City of Oakdale. The project will involve a temporary detour alignment to convey traffic during the construction period, replacement of Hoods Creek Bridge, and bridge and roadway widening and profile raising through the project length. The project will require a total of 1.87 acres of permanent right-of-way acquisition and 1.15 acres of temporary construction easements from the adjacent properties to the north and south. The temporary detour alignment will also involve excess soils, which will not be reused on site.

The surrounding area was assessed for its potential to include remediation sites, aerially deposited lead, asbestos-containing material, lead-based paint, naturally occurring asbestos, yellow thermoplastic or painted striping, pavement markings, and treated wood waste. Information on the site and the surrounding area was obtained through mapping and records from Caltrans, the State Water Resources Control Board, and the Department of Toxic Substances Control.

Environmental Consequences

The project area includes no open remediation sites and is unlikely to include ultramafic rock outcroppings, faults, or other naturally occurring asbestos

formations. As such, the potential to encounter contaminated soils or naturally occurring asbestos is minimal.

However, aerially deposited lead is known to occur in unpaved areas adjacent to highways. Asbestos can also occur in bridge bearing pads, shims, mastic material, or concrete, and any graffiti or other painted surfaces on the bridge may contain lead-based paint. As such, project-specific surveys of aerially deposited lead, asbestos containing material, and lead based paint shall be conducted prior to construction activities.

Additionally, the project will require removal of yellow thermoplastic striping and pavement markings that have high concentrations of lead. The resulting debris will be treated as construction waste. Disposal of treated wood waste, such as that found in guardrails or roadway signage, may also occur as a result of the proposed project.

Best management practices and standard specifications pertaining to hazardous materials are listed in Section 1.5 of this environmental document. Additional avoidance and minimization measures are also included below.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following avoidance and minimization measures will be required for the project unless otherwise indicated after conclusion of project-specific surveys. Full descriptions of the measures are also included in Appendix B of this document.

- HW-1: Liner under stockpiles.
- HW-2: Hazardous materials management.

2.1.10 Hydrology and Water Quality

Considering the information in the Water Quality Assessment Report dated November 20, 2025 and the Location Hydraulic Study dated November 5, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality
a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface water or groundwater quality?	No Impact

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality
b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?	No Impact
c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which will: (i) result in substantial erosion or siltation onsite or offsite;	No Impact
(ii) substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which will result in flooding onsite or offsite;	No Impact
(iii) create or contribute runoff water which will exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or	No Impact
(iv) impede or redirect flood flows?	No Impact
d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?	No Impact
e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?	No Impact

2.1.11 Land Use and Planning

Considering the information in the Community Impact Assessment Memorandum dated December 2, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Land Use and Planning
a) Physically divide an established community?	No Impact

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Land Use and Planning
b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?	No Impact

2.1.12 Mineral Resources

Considering the project scope, the information in the Preliminary Geotechnical Report dated October 6, 2023, and in the Mineral Hazard Mapping produced by the California Geological Survey, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Mineral Resources
a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that will be of value to the region and the residents of the state?	No Impact
b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?	No Impact

2.1.13 Noise

Considering the information in the Noise Compliance Study dated November 21, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project result in:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Noise
a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?	No Impact
b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?	No Impact

Question—Will the project result in:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Noise
c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, will the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?	No Impact

2.1.14 Population and Housing

Considering the information in the Community Impact Assessment Memorandum dated December 2, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Population and Housing
a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?	No Impact
b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?	No Impact

2.1.15 Public Services

Considering the information in the Community Impact Assessment Memorandum dated December 2, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Public Services
a) Will the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services: Fire protection?	No Impact
Police protection?	No Impact
Schools?	No Impact
Parks?	No Impact
Other public facilities?	No Impact

2.1.16 Recreation

Considering the information in the Community Impact Assessment Memorandum dated December 2, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Recreation
a) Will the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility will occur or be accelerated?	No Impact
b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?	No Impact

2.1.17 Transportation

Considering the information in the Community Impact Assessment Memorandum dated December 2, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Transportation
a) Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance, or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?	No Impact
b) Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?	No Impact
c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?	No Impact
d) Result in inadequate emergency access?	No Impact

2.1.18 Tribal Cultural Resources

Considering the information in the Historic Property Survey Report dated November 21, 2025, the Archaeological Survey Report dated July 29, 2025, and the Archaeological Evaluation Report dated July 29, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Will the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code Section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Tribal Cultural Resources
a) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code Section 5020.1(k), or	Less Than Significant Impact

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Tribal Cultural Resources
b) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.	Less Than Significant Impact

Affected Environment

Cultural resource identification efforts on the project are described in Section 2.1.5 of this environmental document. They included reviews of state and private databases, as well as a pedestrian survey and intensive Phase II archaeological investigation of the project site.

Section 106 consultation with Native American Tribes was also conducted. Further consultation details are included in Chapter 3 of this environmental document. Tribal consultation remains ongoing.

Two archaeological sites were identified in the project area. A pedestrian survey of the entire area of potential effect was conducted to confirm the location and condition of the sites. Intensive Phase II subsurface archaeological investigations were also completed in April 2025 where the sites intersected with the project's area of direct impact.

Environmental Consequences

Subsurface testing was conducted within the portions of the two archaeological sites that intersected with the project's area of direct impact, and it was concluded that they do not retain sufficient integrity or data potential to be eligible for listing in either the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or California Register of Historical Resources.

However, these two properties as a whole are assumed eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for the purposes of this project. This assumption is being made because the large size of the sites and access limitations prevented a full evaluation of the entire sites. It is also assumed there is potential for unknown buried deposits within the sites.

Because the project will not diminish the integrity or data potential for the two archaeological sites, Caltrans has determined that a Finding of No Adverse Effect (without Standard Conditions) is appropriate for the project. Concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Officer was obtained for this

finding on April 8, 2026. An environmental monitoring area will be established during construction, and archaeological and Native American Tribal monitoring will be required.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Impacts to the two archaeological sites identified in the project's area of potential effect will be avoided and minimized with the use of the following measures. Full descriptions of the measures are included in Appendix B of this document.

- CU-1: Environmentally Sensitive Area.
- CU-2: Environmental Monitoring Area.

2.1.19 Utilities and Service Systems

Considering the scope of the proposed project and the information in the Water Quality Assessment Report dated November 20, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Utilities and Service Systems
a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?	No Impact
b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?	No Impact
c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?	No Impact
d) Generate solid waste in excess of state or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?	No Impact

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Utilities and Service Systems
e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?	No Impact

2.1.20 Wildfire

Considering the information in the Climate Change Study dated December 3, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones:

Question—Will the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Wildfire
a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	No Impact
b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?	No Impact
c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?	No Impact
d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?	No Impact

2.1.21 Mandatory Findings of Significance

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Mandatory Findings of Significance
a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated
b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? ("Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.)	No Impact
c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	Less Than Significant Impact

Affected Environment

The project will affect agricultural resources, biological resources, archaeological and Tribal cultural resources, greenhouse gas emissions, and hazardous materials. These impacts will occur from both construction and the temporary detour alignment and stream crossing to convey traffic during the construction period. The work will require a total of 1.87 acres of permanent right-of-way acquisition and 1.15 acres of temporary construction easements from the adjacent properties to the north and south.

Environmental Consequences

The proposed project may cause impacts to agricultural resources, archaeological and Tribal cultural resources, greenhouse gas emissions, and hazardous materials. Impacts to adjacent agricultural parcels and archaeological and Tribal cultural resources will potentially result in indirect effects to human beings. With the implementation of avoidance and

minimization measures as discussed in Chapter 2 and Appendix B, the effects of these impacts will be less than significant.

The project may also impact biological resources, but with the implementation of avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures as discussed in Chapter 2 and Appendix B, the effects will be less than significant with mitigation incorporated.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

With the implementation of avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures, the project will have a less than significant impact on the environment. All other impacts will be minimized through the implementation of Caltrans best management practices, Standard Specifications, and Standard Special Provisions. Therefore, the project will not have a significant impact on species, habitat, or any other natural or historical resource.

Chapter 3 Coordination

Coordination with the following agencies and interested parties was conducted as part of the preparation of technical studies for this environmental document.

Biological Resources Consultation

Caltrans submitted a Biological Assessment for the Hoods Creek Bridge Replacement Project to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in a correspondence dated June 10, 2024. The Biological Assessment described a two-part action, a pre-construction cultural investigation and the ultimate bridge replacement construction project. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service provided comments on the Biological Assessment in an e-mail correspondence dated August 1, 2024.

As per Caltrans and United States Fish and Wildlife Service conversation of August 8, 2024, Caltrans agreed to pursue the cultural resources investigation portion and the bridge replacement portion of the proposed project as two separate actions. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service informed Caltrans that final listing decisions for species proposed for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act are unlikely to occur until the spring of 2025. Caltrans and United States Fish and Wildlife Service discussed proceeding with Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation for the California tiger salamander for the cultural resources investigation action immediately and deferring the initiation of consultation the bridge replacement action until Caltrans has proceeded with further design. Caltrans and United States Fish and Wildlife Service also discussed that the northwestern pond turtle and western spadefoot have been proposed for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act. As of the date of this environmental document, these species have not been formally listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

Caltrans updated the Biological Assessment to analyze only the cultural resources investigation action on October 21, 2024, based on comments provided by United States Fish and Wildlife Service on October 10, 2024. United States Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Letter of Concurrence that agreed with Caltrans' determination that the Cultural Resources Investigation Project "may affect but is not likely to adversely affect" the California tiger salamander on November 6, 2024.

On August 12, 2025, Caltrans submitted a Biological Assessment for the Hoods Creek Bridge Replacement Project. On August 22, 2025, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service provided comments on the August 12, 2025 Biological Assessment, and on August 22, 2025, Caltrans provided an updated Biological Assessment in response.

On August 28, 2025, Caltrans Design notified Caltrans of proposed scope updates. Caltrans provided a second Biological Assessment Update on October 28, 2025, in response to recent Caltrans project scope updates.

The following language has been added after public circulation of the draft environmental document. On May 14, 2026, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Biological Opinion, concurring with the determinations of the project Biological Assessment and concluding Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation for the project.

Cultural and Native American Tribal Consultation

The following sentence has been revised since public circulation of the draft environmental document to correct the date that informational letters were sent to regional stakeholders, previously listed as September 15, 2023. On November 16, 2022, the Caltrans Architectural Historian initiated local consultation by sending informational letters to regional stakeholders. Letters were addressed to the Stanislaus County Historical Society and the Stanislaus County Community Development Department. These letters included a brief project description and an invitation to participate in the cultural resource review process. No responses were received.

The Caltrans District 10 Native American Coordinator submitted a request to the Native American Heritage Commission on January 17, 2023, for a search of their Sacred Lands File and a current list of tribal contacts for Stanislaus County. The Native American Heritage Commission responded on February 21, 2023, confirming a negative result for sacred lands in the immediate project area and providing a list of Native American groups traditionally affiliated with the region. These contacts included representatives of four Tribes, including the California Valley Me-Wuk Indians, North Valley Yokuts Tribe, Tule River Indian Tribe, and Wilton Rancheria.

On March 14, 2023, the Caltrans District 10 Native American Coordinator sent formal Section 106 consultation letters and a project location map to all Tribal representatives listed by the Native American Heritage Commission. Correspondence was sent via email and included a summary of the proposed bridge replacement project.

On April 3, 2024, follow-up emails were sent to all previously contacted Tribes providing updates to the project description, including minor design refinements and clarification of anticipated ground disturbance. On April 9, 2024, a response was received from a representative of the Chicken Ranch Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians requesting additional information and expressing interest in continued consultation. On April 11, 2024, a representative of the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians requested information about the construction schedule and monitoring procedures.

Caltrans provided the requested information and confirmed that a representative of the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians will participate as a Native American monitor during ground-disturbing activities, as detailed in the Archaeological Monitoring Plan. Consultation remains ongoing.

The following language has been added after public circulation of the draft environmental document. On March 26, 2026, the Historic Property Survey Report for the project was submitted to the State Historic Preservation Officer, along with a request for concurrence on the Finding of No Adverse Effect (without Standard Conditions). Concurrence was obtained on the finding on April 8, 2026.

Appendix A Title VI Policy Statement

CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

GAVIN NEWSOM, GOVERNOR

California Department of Transportation

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September 2024

TITLE VI/NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the assurances set forth in the Caltrans' Title VI Program Plan, to ensure that no person in the United States shall on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Related non-discrimination authorities, remedies, and state law further those protections, including sex, disability, religion, sexual orientation, age, low income, and Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Caltrans is committed to complying with 23 C.F.R. Part 200, 49 C.F.R. Part 21, 49 C.F.R. Part 303, and the Federal Transit Administration Circular 4702.1B. Caltrans will make every effort to ensure nondiscrimination in all of its services, programs, and activities, whether they are federally funded or not, and that services and benefits are fairly distributed to all people, regardless of race, color, or national origin (including LEP). In addition, Caltrans will facilitate meaningful participation in the transportation planning process in a non-discriminatory manner.

The overall responsibility for this policy is assigned to the Caltrans Director. The Caltrans Title VI Coordinator is assigned to the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights Deputy Director, who then delegates sufficient responsibility and authority to the Office of Civil Rights' managers, including the Title VI Branch Manager, to effectively implement the Caltrans Title VI Program. Individuals with questions or requiring additional information relating to the policy or the implementation of the Caltrans Title VI Program should contact the Title VI Branch Manager at title.vi@dot.ca.gov or at (916) 639-6392, or visit the following web page: <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/title-vi>.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Tavares'.

TONY TAVARES
Director

"Provide a safe and reliable transportation network that serves all people and respects the environment"

Appendix B Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures

Appendix B has been updated since public circulation of the draft environmental document in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, as documented in Appendix C. Measure BIO-8 (Pre-Construction Surveys for California Tiger Salamander) has been added, and the following avoidance and minimization measures have been renumbered appropriately to account for the addition of a new measure. Measures BIO-28 (Pre-Construction Surveys for Western Burrowing Owl) and BIO-29 (Pre-Construction Surveys for Crotch's Bumble Bee) have also been added.

The following measures will mitigate the project's potentially significant impacts to biological resources as discussed in Section 2.1.4 of this document.

- **BIO-1: Compensatory Mitigation – Waters of the United States and the State of California.** Compensatory mitigation will be required under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act for the estimated loss of 62.92 square feet (0.001-acre) of other waters of the United States. Compensatory mitigation will also be required under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act or Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act for the estimated loss of 235.94 square feet (0.005-acre) of isolated wetlands qualifying as waters of the State of California.

Compensatory mitigation is expected to be accomplished through participation in the United States Army Corps of Engineers Sacramento Office and National Fish and Wildlife Federation's in-lieu fees program.

- **BIO-6: Compensatory Mitigation – California Tiger Salamander.** Compensatory mitigation will be required for the total loss of 4.28 acres of California tiger salamander upland habitat due to significant impacts resulting from permanent fill and the temporary detour alignment during construction. Impacts will be compensated by acquiring 5.02 acre-credits from a United State Fish and Wildlife Service-approved mitigation bank. The loss of 0.16-acre from permanent fill and 0.58-acre from permanent impacts from the temporary detour alignment will be compensated at a 2:1 ratio (1.48 acre-credits). Temporary impacts to 3.54 acres of upland habitat from the detour alignment will be compensated at a 1:1 ratio (3.54 acre-credits).

The following measures will avoid or minimize the project's less than significant impacts to biological resources as discussed in Section 2.1.4 of this document.

- **BIO-2: Environmentally Sensitive Area Designation (Biology).**

Additional direct and indirect impacts to sensitive biological resources throughout the project area will be avoided or minimized by designating “Environmentally Sensitive Areas”. All areas outside of the proposed construction footprint shall be considered as Environmentally Sensitive Areas, as well as any areas determined by a qualified biologist during project planning or during pre-construction surveys to qualify for Environmentally Sensitive Area designation.

Environmentally Sensitive Area information will be shown on contract plans and discussed in Section 14-1.02 of the Caltrans Standard Specifications or any Special Provisions in Section 14-1.02.

Environmentally Sensitive Area provisions may include, but are not necessarily limited to, the use of temporary orange fencing or other high-visibility marking to identify the proposed limit of work in areas adjacent sensitive resources or to locate and exclude sensitive resources from potential construction impacts. Contractor encroachment into Environmentally Sensitive Areas will be prohibited and immediate work stoppage and notification to the Caltrans Resident Engineer is required if an Environmentally Sensitive Area is breached. Environmentally Sensitive Area provisions will be implemented as a first order of work and remain in place until all construction activities are complete.

- **BIO-3: Designated Biologist.** A Designated Biologist or biologists shall be on-site during any activities that have the potential to affect sensitive biological resources. The Designated Biologist will monitor regulated species and habitats, ensure that construction activities do not result in the un-intended take of regulated species or disturbances to regulated habitats, will ensure that construction activities comply with any permits, licenses, agreements, or contracts, will immediately notify the Caltrans Resident Engineer or of any take of regulated species, disturbances to regulated habitats, or breaches of Environmentally Sensitive Areas, and will prepare, submit, and sign notifications and reports. A Designated Biologist who performs specialized activities must have demonstrated field experience working with the regulated species or performing the specialized task and regulatory agency approval will be required prior to Caltrans’ acceptance of the Designated Biologist.

- **BIO-4: Limited Operation Period – Stream Zone Construction Activities.** It is proposed that construction activities occurring in aquatic habitat within the project construction footprint and Action Area shall occur between May 1 and October 15 of any construction season, unless earlier or later dates for in-channel construction activities are approved by regulatory agencies. By requiring contractors to adhere to these dates for stream-zone construction, the project proponent will minimize project effects to receiving waters.

- **BIO-5: Restore and Revegetate Temporarily Disturbed Areas Onsite.** Disturbed areas within the construction limits will be graded to minimize surface erosion and siltation into receiving waters. Disturbed areas will be re-contoured to as close to pre-project condition as possible and will be stabilized as soon as feasible as (and no later than October 15 of each construction season) to avoid erosion during subsequent storms and runoff. Permanent erosion control seeding will be performed at all disturbed sites by hydro-seeding over the course of construction as each site is completed, with all sites seeded by the completion of construction activities.
- **BIO-7: Worker Environmental Awareness Training for Construction Personnel.** Before any work occurs in the project area, a qualified designated biologist (a Designated Biologist familiar with the resources to be protected) will conduct a mandatory Worker Environmental Awareness Training for all construction personnel. The awareness training will be provided to all personnel to brief them on the need to avoid and minimize effects to Federal Endangered Species Act-listed species within and adjacent to the construction areas and the penalties for not complying with applicable state and federal laws and permit requirements.

The Designated Biologist will inform all construction personnel. about the life history and habitat requirements of Federal Endangered Species Act-listed species and their habitats known to occur or with potential for occurrence onsite, the importance of maintaining habitat, and the terms and conditions of regulatory requirements. The Worker Environmental Awareness Training will cover general restrictions and guidelines that must be followed by all construction personnel to reduce or avoid effects to Federal Endangered Species Act-listed species and their habitats during the investigation.

Worker Environmental Awareness Training shall be required for any construction personnel. intending to enter the construction zone for more than 15 minutes. Any Designated Biologists conducting Worker Environmental Awareness Training must meet the qualifications of regulatory agencies, and copies of training sign-in sheets for construction personnel will be provided to regulatory agencies upon their request.

- **BIO-8: Pre-Construction Surveys for California Tiger Salamander.** The following avoidance and minimization measure has been added after public circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

No more than 14 days prior to the beginning of ground disturbance or construction activities, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-approved biologist will conduct a visual encounter preconstruction survey of both aquatic and upland habitats for the tiger salamander within the project footprint. The

survey will emphasize detecting any burrows, crevices, and other cover sites that may be used as refugia as well as detecting any tiger salamanders above ground. All burrows that can be avoided by at least 50 feet will be flagged/marked. The survey will take place prior to the installation of exclusion fencing (see Measure BIO-9 below) to maximize clearance of the construction zone and to minimize the risk of individuals becoming trapped within the fenced area. Caltrans will notify the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the survey results even if there are no detections. If construction stops for a period of two weeks or longer, a new preconstruction survey of these work areas (including staging areas) will be completed no more than 14 days prior to work restarting.

- **BIO-9: Temporary Exclusion Fencing.** Prior to commencing construction activities, temporary exclusion fencing shall be installed along the boundaries of the construction area footprint to prevent California tiger salamanders from dispersing into the project area during construction activities. Temporary exclusion fencing shall be designed to allow California tiger salamanders to leave the project area through one-way funnels or another method approved by United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The Designated Biologist shall inspect the temporary exclusion fencing for damage and for California tiger salamander daily, and during and after rain events. The Designated Biologist shall relocate animals found within the interior fence to outside the exclusion fence line as close as possible to the capture location. The exclusion fencing shall remain in place until all construction activities have been completed and related equipment has been removed from the project area.

The following details have been added after circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Temporary exclusion fencing will be installed immediately following pre-construction surveys, will be of a type or design that will not entangle California tiger salamander, and will be three feet tall and be buried at least six inches below the ground to prevent the tiger salamander from burrowing or moving under the structure. It will have a minimum four-inch lip at the top facing away from the work area to deter climbing. All fencing will be inspected regularly, maintained in good condition throughout construction, and removed following project completion.

- **BIO-10: Prevent Entrapment.** To prevent inadvertent entrapment of California tiger salamanders, the Designated Biologist shall check all open excavations, including but not limited to open holes and trenches more than 6-inches deep, for trapped animals each day. During the workday, before any open trenches or holes are filled, the Designated Biologist shall thoroughly inspect the trenches or holes for California tiger salamander. At the close of each working day, the Designated Biologist shall check open excavations and ensure that all excavated, steep-walled holes or trenches

more than 6 inches deep are provided with one or more escape ramps constructed of earthen fill or wooden planks with a slope of 3:1, or are covered with boards or metal plates placed flush to the ground with edges overlaid by loose dirt leaving no gaps for species entry. If a California tiger salamander is found, the Designated Biologist shall move the individual to a location outside the exclusion fence line as close as possible to the capture location.

If any open holes, trenches or other excavations greater than 6 inches deep cannot be covered or fitted with escape ramps as described above, then temporary exclusion fence shall be installed around these trenches, holes, or other excavations to prevent California tiger salamander from becoming trapped. Refuge opportunities, such as coverboards (2-foot by 3-foot or larger plywood), shall be provided on the outside perimeter of the barrier.

- **BIO-11: California Tiger Salamander Relocation.** The Designated Biologist shall prepare a California tiger salamander relocation plan. The relocation plan shall include, but not be limited to, an identification of the survey, capture, handling, and relocation methods, and identification of where the individuals will be relocated to. Relocation areas shall be identified by the Designated Biologist based upon best suitable habitat available and time of year and approved by United States Fish and Wildlife prior to the start of construction activities. The relocation plan shall be submitted to United States Fish and Wildlife for approval prior to the beginning of covered activities. Construction activities anywhere within the project area may not proceed until the relocation plan is approved in writing by United States Fish and Wildlife. Only the approved Designated Biologist is authorized to capture and handle California tiger salamander.
- **BIO-12: California Tiger Salamander – Restrict Work During Rain Events.** No activities will be conducted in habitat areas where the California tiger salamander may occur if it is raining, or if there is a greater than 70 percent chance of rain based on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service forecast on any given work day, or within 48 hours following a rain event greater than 0.25 inch.
- **BIO-13: Temporary Construction Lighting Minimization.** Nighttime work during the California tiger salamander active period shall be limited in extent, duration, and brightness to the minimum amount necessary to complete the approved nighttime work. Lighting shall face downward and shall only be used in the immediate workspace. All nighttime work shall be suspended during rain events. If nighttime work occurs during the California tiger salamander migration/active season from November 1 to April 30, then all nighttime work shall be monitored by the Designated Biologist.

- **BIO-14: Construction Lighting – Color Temperature.** It is highly recommended that outdoor temporary construction lighting and outdoor temporary signal lighting luminaries have correlated color temperatures under approximately 3,000 Kelvin. Luminaries in this color range are more energy efficient, improve public health and safety, and are less disturbing to nocturnal wildlife including birds, insects, turtles, fish, amphibian, bats, and other species. Luminaries for both permanent and temporary lighting systems are specified in Caltrans 2024 Standard Specifications Section 86-1.02K.

Luminaries for all lighting systems must be either low-pressure sodium or light emitting diode-type. Low-pressure sodium lamps have color temperature that generally range from 2,200 Kelvin to 2,700 Kelvin and these types of luminaries easily meet this recommendation. Caltrans 2023 Standard Specifications specify that all luminaries must have a correlated color temperature range from 2,700 Kelvin to 3,500 Kelvin. Non-standard special provisions may need to be developed under Caltrans 2024 Standard Specifications Section 86-1.02K to specify light emitting diode luminaries with color temperatures of under 3,000 Kelvin.

To prevent unnecessary outdoor light pollution, temporary outdoor construction lighting as well as outdoor permanent roadway and signal lighting luminaries will be shielded in a manner that prevents light from penetrating above the 90-degree angle.

- **BIO-15: Aquatic Wildlife – Pre-Construction Surveys.** A focused survey for western pond turtles shall be conducted by a Designated Biologist within 10 days prior to the beginning to project-related activities. If western pond turtles are found, a protective no-work buffer will be established and Caltrans shall consult with California Department of Fish and Wildlife to comply with provisions of the Fish and Game Code of California and will consult with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to comply with provisions of the Federal Endangered Species Act. If a lapse in project related work of 10 days or longer occurs, another survey and, if required, consultation with California Department of Fish and Wildlife United States Fish and Wildlife Service will be required before the work can be reinitiated. Pre-construction surveys for western pond turtles shall be specified under Caltrans 2024 Standard Specification and/or Standard Special Provision 14-6.03A (Species Protection).
- **BIO-16: Aquatic Wildlife – Protective Buffers.** If western pond turtles are detected by the Designated Biologist during the pre-construction survey, then a 50-foot no-disturbance buffer will be established around the work zone. No work will commence within the buffer until authorization is received from the Resident Engineer.

- **BIO-17: Aquatic Wildlife – Construction Monitoring.** If construction or other project related activities which may potentially cause adverse effects to western pond turtles are necessary, monitoring of the work site by a Designated Biologist will be required to ensure that protective radii are maintained.
- **BIO-18: Western Spadefoot – Pre-Construction Surveys.** A focused survey for western spadefoot shall be conducted by a Designated Biologist within 10 days prior to the beginning to project-related activities. If western pond turtles are found, a protective no-work buffer will be established and Caltrans shall consult with California Department of Fish and Wildlife to comply with provisions of the Fish and Game Code of California and will consult with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to comply with provisions of the Federal Endangered Species Act. If a lapse in project related work of 10 days or longer occurs, another survey and, if required, consultation with California Department of Fish and Wildlife United States Fish and Wildlife Service will be required before the work can be reinitiated. Pre-construction surveys western spadefoot shall be specified under Caltrans 2024 Standard Specification and/or Standard Special Provision 14-6.03A (Species Protection).

The following language has been added after public circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Caltrans will conduct pre-construction surveys for western spadefoot in accessible areas within approximately 500 feet of the project Action Area.

- **BIO-19: Western Spadefoot – Protective Buffers.** If western spadefoot are detected by the Designated Biologist during the pre-construction survey, then a 50-foot no-disturbance buffer will be established around the work zone. No work will commence within the buffer until authorization is received from the Resident Engineer.
- **BIO-20: Western Spadefoot – Construction Monitoring.** If construction or other project related activities which may potentially cause adverse effects to western spadefoot are necessary, monitoring of the work site by a Designated Biologist will be required to ensure that protective radii are maintained.
- **BIO-21: Migratory Birds and Raptors – Pre-Construction Surveys During Nesting Season.** If woody vegetation removal, structures construction, ground-disturbing activities, or other project-related activities are scheduled during the nesting season of protected raptors and migratory birds (February 1 to September 30), a focused survey for active nests of such birds shall be conducted by a Designated Biologist within 14 days prior to the beginning to project-related activities. If active nests are found, a protective no-work buffer will be established and Caltrans shall

consult with United States Fish and Wildlife Service regarding appropriate action to comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and with California Department of Fish and Wildlife to comply with provisions of the Fish and Game Code of California. If a lapse in project related work of 15 days or longer occurs, another survey and, if required, consultation with United States Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be required before the work can be reinitiated. Pre-construction surveys for nesting migratory birds and raptors shall be specified under Caltrans 2024 Standard Specification and/or Standard Special Provision 14-6.03A (Species Protection) and/or 14-6.03(B) (Bird Protection).

The following language has been added after public circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Pre-construction surveys for Swainson's hawk will be conducted in accessible areas within approximately 0.5-mile of the project Action Area. Pre-construction surveys for tricolored blackbird will be conducted in accessible areas within approximately 500 feet of the project Action Area.

- **BIO-22: Migratory Birds and Raptors – Protective Buffers.** If nesting migratory birds or nesting raptors are detected by the Designated Biologist during the pre-construction survey, the appropriate no-work buffer will need be established around the nest or burrow. No work will commence within the buffer until authorization is received from the Resident Engineer. Protective buffer radii for nesting migratory birds and raptors shall be specified under Caltrans 2024 Standard Specification and/or Standard Special Provision 14-6.03A (Species Protection) and/or 14-6.03(B) (Bird Protection).
- **BIO-23: Migratory Birds and Raptors – Construction Monitoring.** If construction or other project related activities which may potentially cause nest destruction, nest abandonment or forced fledging of migratory birds are necessary, monitoring of the nest site by a Designated Biologist will be required to ensure that protective radii and any exclusionary devices are maintained and functioning properly.
- **BIO-24: Roosting Bats Avoidance – Pre-Construction Surveys.** If woody vegetation removal, structures construction, swallow mud nest removal, or other project-related activities in bat day-roosting sites are scheduled between February 1 to September 30, a focused survey for day-roosting bats shall be conducted by a Designated Biologist within 15 days prior to the beginning to project-related activities. If active day roosts are found, a protective no-work buffer will be established, and Caltrans shall consult with California Department of Fish and Wildlife to comply with provisions of the Fish and Game Code of California. If a lapse in project related work of 15 days or longer occurs, another survey and, if required,

consultation with California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be required before the work can be reinitiated. Pre-construction surveys for roosting bats shall be specified under Caltrans 2024 Standard Specification and/or Standard Special Provision 14-6.03A (Species Protection).

- **BIO-25: Roosting Bats Avoidance – Protective Buffers.** If day-roosting bats are detected by the Designated Biologist during the pre-construction survey, a fifty (50) -foot no-work buffer will be established around the roost. No work will commence within the buffer until authorization is received from the Resident Engineer.
- **BIO-26: Roosting Bats Avoidance – Construction Monitoring.** If construction or other project related activities which may potentially result in adverse effects to bats or bat day-roost sites, monitoring of the day-roost site by a Designated Biologist will be required to ensure that protective radii and any exclusionary devices are maintained and functioning properly.
- **BIO-27: Roosting Bats Avoidance – Bat Roost Management.** Because proposed bridge work will be subject to regulation under Section 1600 et seq. of the California Fish and Game Code, a Bat Roost Management Plan shall be prepared for review and approval of the California Department of Fish and Game prior to the onset of construction activities. The Bat Management Plan shall propose the timing, methodology, and materials for mud nest inspection, mud nest removal, and exclusion devices according to guidance provided in “California Bat Working Group 2022. Bats in Swallow Nests (rev. 4 April 2022).”
- **BIO-28: Pre-Construction Surveys for Western Burrowing Owl.** The following avoidance and minimization measure has been added after public circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Caltrans will conduct pre-construction surveys within accessible areas within approximately 1,640 feet of the project Action Area and will conduct construction-phase monitoring for nesting and/or active western burrowing owl burrows. In the event an active western burrowing owl nest or burrow is detected during construction surveys or monitoring, and a 1,640-foot no-disturbance buffer is not feasible, Caltrans will consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take.

- **BIO-29: Pre-Construction Surveys for Crotch’s Bumble Bee.** The following avoidance and minimization measure has been added after public circulation of the draft environmental document, in response to comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Caltrans will conduct pre-construction surveys within accessible areas within approximately 500 feet of the project Action Area and will conduct construction-phase monitoring for foraging bumble bees and active bumble bee hives. In the event Crotch's bumble bee is detected or if an active bumble bee hive is detected during construction surveys or monitoring, Caltrans will consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take.

The following measures will avoid or minimize the project's less than significant impacts to cultural resources as discussed in Section 2.1.4 of this document.

- **CU-1: Environmentally Sensitive Area Designation (Cultural).** A horizontal Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) will be established prior to construction using high-visibility fencing to protect cultural site features from direct and indirect project impacts. Details for the Environmentally Sensitive Area are described in an Environmentally Sensitive Area Action Plan and will be represented as needed in the project's plans, specifications, estimates, and construction contract. 2024 Caltrans Standard Special Provision 14-1.02A (Environmentally Sensitive Area) will apply.
- **CU-2: Environmental Monitoring Area.** An Environmental Monitoring Area (EMA) will be established, and archaeological monitoring will be required during all project work within this monitoring area. Native American monitoring will also be required and must be scheduled at least five business days prior to work in the monitoring area. The monitoring area will be represented as needed in the project's plans, specifications, estimates, and construction contract. 2024 Caltrans Standard Specification 14-2.03 and Caltrans Standard Special Provision 14-2.03A (Environmental Monitoring Area) will apply.

The following measures will avoid or minimize greenhouse gas emission impacts from temporary construction activities as discussed in Section 2.1.8 of this document.

- **GHG-1: Limit equipment idling.** The construction contractor will limit idling to 5 minutes for delivery and dump trucks and other diesel-powered equipment.
- **GHG-2: Schedule truck trips.** The construction contractor will schedule truck trips outside of peak morning and evening commute hours.
- **GHG-3: Improve fuel efficiency.** The construction contractor will improve fuel efficiency by maintaining equipment, using the right size equipment for the job, and using equipment with new technologies where feasible.

- **GHG-4: Reduce waste.** The construction contractor will reduce waste by salvaging demolition material for usable fill, or reusing existing project features and materials on-site where feasible.

The following measures will avoid or minimize hazardous materials impacts from temporary construction activities as discussed in Section 2.1.9 of this document.

- **HW-1: Liner under stockpiles.** A liner must be utilized for materials stockpiling. Caltrans 2024 Standard Special Provision 14-11.05B (Liner) will be included in the construction contract.
- **HW-2: Hazardous materials management.** Caltrans Standard Special Provisions 14-11.08 (Regulated Material Containing Aerially Deposited Lead), 14-11.09 (Minimal Disturbance of Regulated Material Containing Aerially Deposited Lead), 14-11.14 (Treated Wood Waste), and 14-11.16 (Asbestos-Containing Construction Materials in Bridges) will be included in the construction contract.

Appendix C Comment Letters and Responses

This appendix was added after the draft environmental document completed circulation. It contains the two comments received during the public circulation and comment period from February 13, 2026, and March 16, 2026, retyped for readability. The comment letter is stated verbatim as submitted, with acronyms, abbreviations, and any original grammatical or typographical errors included. A Caltrans response follows the comment presented. A copy of the original comment letter can be found in Volume 2 of this document.

Comment from the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation:

Hello,

Your project is published and available for review. Please note the State and Local review 'start' and 'end' dates.

To view your project and any attachments via CEQAnet: Click "Navigation" and select "Published Document"

Additional information is on State Clearinghouse (SCH) website - FAQs:
<https://lci.ca.gov/sch/faq.html>

Notice of Closing Letters: The SCH will not provide a close of review period acknowledgement on your CEQA environmental document. Comments submitted by State agencies are made available on CEQAnet by the SCH during and after the review period.

To view comments on your project via CEQAnet, please visit:
<https://ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/Search/Advanced>

- Search for the SCH# using the Advanced Search in CEQAnet
- Select the correct document.
- Under "Attachments," view attachments labeled "State Comment Letters [Comments from State Reviewing Agency(ies)]"
- If there are no comments from a State agency about your project, it means none have been received.

****When Requesting Updates to Published/Posted Document(s)/Project(s):**
Please note that the State Clearinghouse (SCH) does not remove attachments from published projects unless there is confidential information that cannot be displayed online.

- To make changes to a published document, send requests and any attachments to state.clearinghouse@opr.ca.gov. Please also provide a brief memo on lead agency letterhead explaining what changes/corrections have been made.

[Link]

Thank you,

Meng Heu | He/Him

Technical Business Analyst

Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (formerly known as
Office of Planning and Research (OPR))

(916) 445-0613 | meng.heu@lci.ca.gov

opr.ca.gov | Follow us on LinkedIn | Follow us on X

****Note:** No reply, response, or information provided constitutes legal advice.

Response to Comment from the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation:

Thank you for confirming receipt of the draft environmental document and for assisting with public circulation of the document.

Comment from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District:

Good Morning Laura,

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District received a referral for comment on the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Hoods Creek Bridge Replacement prepared by the California Department of Transportation. That document references an air quality memorandum dated November 3, 2023 that contains the air quality analysis for this project. The MND also provided your contact information to request that memo and asked that we include the below information:

Project title: Hoods Creek Bridge Replacement
General location information: East of Farmington on State Route 4 District
number-county code-route-post mile: 10- STA-4-7.1/7.4
Project ID number: 10-1H230 / 1020000178

Would you be able to send over that information?

Thank you,

Matt Crow
Air Quality Specialist II
San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District
1990 E. Gettysburg Avenue Fresno, CA 93726
Phone: (559) 230.5931
Matt.Crow@valleyair.org

Response 1 to Comment from San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District:

Thank you for your interest and comments on this environmental document for the Hoods Creek Bridge Replacement project.

Caltrans has corrected the date of the Air Quality Memorandum date cited in Section 2.1.3 of this final environmental document from November 3, 2023 to November 3, 2025 and provided the Air Quality Memorandum to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District for reference.

Senior Environmental Scientist Laura Cook also provided an email response to the request on February 27, 2026, as written in Response 2 to Comment from San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District below.

Response 2 to Comment from San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District:

Good morning Matt,

Thank you for reaching out regarding the Hoods Creek Bridge Replacement project (10-STA-4-7.1/7.4; EA 10-1H230).

Please find attached the updated Air Quality Memorandum dated November 3, 2025. In your email, you indicated the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration references a November 3, 2023 memorandum; this appears to be a typographical error and will be corrected in the Final Environmental Document. For completeness, I have also attached the original June 5, 2023 Air Quality Memorandum, which predates the subsequent project scope refinement.

I have copied the project Environmental Generalist, Aleko (Alexandros) Xides, on this email for record-keeping and project file documentation purposes.

Please let me know if you need any additional information.

Thank you,

Laura Cook
Senior Environmental Scientist (Supervisory)
D10 Environmental Management Branch 2
Phone 209-662-2261
In-Office Days Monday, Tuesday
Email laura.cook@dot.ca.gov
1976 E. Dr. MLK Jr. Blvd., Stockton, CA 95205

Comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

March 13, 2026

Laura Cook
California Department of Transportation
1976 East Doctor Martin Luther King Junior Boulevard
Stockton, California 95205
(209) 662-2261
Laura.Cook@dot.ca.gov

Subject: Hoods Creek Bridge Replacement Project 10-1H230 (Project)
Initial Study with Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/PMND)
State Clearinghouse Number: 2026020519

Dear Laura Cook:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received an IS/PMND from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for the above-referenced Project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations regarding those activities involved in the Project that may affect California fish and wildlife. Likewise, CDFW appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding those aspects of the Project that CDFW, by law, may be required to carry out or approve through the exercise of its own regulatory authority under Fish and Game Code.

CDFW ROLE

CDFW is California's Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources and holds those resources in trust by statute for all the people of the State (Fish & G. Code, §§ 711.7, subd. (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; CEQA Guidelines § 15386, subd. (a)). CDFW, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (Id., § 1802). Similarly, for purposes of CEQA, CDFW is charged by law to provide, as available, biological expertise during public agency environmental review efforts, focusing specifically on projects and related activities that have the potential to adversely affect fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW is also submitting comments as a Responsible Agency under CEQA (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381). CDFW expects that it may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. Likewise, to the extent implementation of the Project as proposed may result in "take" as defined by State law of any species

protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 et seq.), related authorization as provided by the Fish and Game Code may be required.

Nesting Birds: CDFW has jurisdiction over actions with the potential to result in the disturbance or destruction of active nest sites or unauthorized take of birds. Fish and Game Code sections that protect birds, their eggs, or nests include sections 3503 (regarding unlawful take, possession or needless destruction of the nest or eggs of any bird), 3503.5 (regarding the take, possession or destruction of any birds-of-prey or their nests or eggs), and 3513 (regarding unlawful take of any migratory nongame bird). **Unlisted Species:** Species of plants and animals need not be officially listed as Endangered, Rare, or Threatened (E, R, or T) on any State or federal list to be considered E, R, or T under CEQA. If a species can be shown to meet the criteria for E, R, or T, as specified in the CEQA Guidelines section 15380, CDFW recommends it be fully considered in the environmental analysis for the Project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Proponent: Caltrans

Objective: The Project proposes to replace the existing Hoods Creek Bridge (Bridge Number 38-0041), which currently has poor structural integrity, excessive bridge scouring, recurring flooding, and nonstandard conditions. The Project scope of work includes raising the roadway profile for the proposed bridge, roadway widening with standard shoulders, and installing guard rail and roadway drainage new culverts.

Location: The Project site is located on State Route 4 between post miles 7.1 and 7.4, in Stanislaus County.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the following comments and recommendations to assist Caltrans in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, direct and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. Editorial comments or other suggestions may also be included to improve a subsequent CEQA document if additional CEQA review is conducted for the Project.

According to aerial imagery, the proposed Project site is relatively flat, undeveloped land that is comprised of annual grassland and wetland vegetation surrounding Hoods Creek, a perennial stream. Based on a review of the IS/PMND, the Natural Environment Study (NES) in support of the Project's IS/PMND, California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) records, and aerial imagery of the Project site and surrounding habitat, the Project is within the geographic range of, and could potentially impact, several special-

status animal species including, but not limited to, the State and federally threatened California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*); the State threatened Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsonii*) and tricolor blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*); the State candidate western burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*) and Crotch's bumble bee (*Bombus crotchii*); and the federally proposed threatened and State species of special concern western spadefoot (*Spea hammondi*). CDFW has no comments on the impact assessment and avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures in the IS/MND regarding the federally proposed for listing northwestern pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*), roosting bats, habitat connectivity, fish passage, and special status plants.

CDFW recommends that the following additional information be addressed in the Mitigated Negative Declaration, including proposed avoidance, minimization, and compensatory measures prior to adoption by Caltrans.

California Tiger Salamander

As identified in the IS/PMND, the Project site is within the geographic range and has suitable habitat for California tiger salamander (CTS) and the Project will result in temporary and permanent impacts to CTS upland habitat. CDFW concurs with this finding, as well as the determination that an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) with CDFW is warranted, pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 2081, subdivision (b). The IS/PMND describes that Hoods Creek is not suitable potential breeding habitat for CTS due to the presence of predatory bullfrogs (*Rana catesbeiana*) and high temperatures. However, the presence of bullfrogs and high temperatures may not preclude the potential for CTS breeding within the Project reach of Hoods Creek or nearby ephemeral ponds located between 0.1 and at least 1.3 miles of the Project site.

CTS have adapted to warm temperatures and ponds that dry out early in the spring by breeding early and metamorphosing faster than previously considered (O'Brien and Helm 2025). The fact that researchers have identified that bullfrogs prey on CTS (e.g., Anderson 1968, Morey and Guinn 1992, Shaffer and Fisher 1991), indicates the co-occurrence of the species and does not mean that all CTS are consumed and killed by bullfrogs. Bullfrogs have been found in at least four known CTS breeding ponds in Santa Barbara County (USFWS 2016) and at a mitigation site in Madera County (CDFW, in-house data). The NES describes that Hoods Creek and the closest evaluated pools do not have suitable hydrology for CTS breeding. However, aerial imagery suggests that the stream may dry down sufficiently during some years, and one or more of the pools may stay wet long enough during some years, either of which could result in pools that support CTS breeding.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: CTS Protocol Surveys

CDFW recommends a qualified biologist assess presence/absence of CTS breeding in suitable habitat areas located within a minimum 250-foot buffer of the of Project site by conducting protocol-level surveys in accordance with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) “Interim Guidance on Site Assessment and Field Surveys for Determining Presence or a Negative Finding of the California Tiger Salamander” (USFWS 2003). The protocol-level surveys for CTS require more than one survey season and are dependent upon sufficient rainfall to complete. Consultation with CDFW and the USFWS is recommended well in advance of beginning the surveys and prior to any planned vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities. Please be advised that protocol-level survey results are viable for two years after the results are reviewed by CDFW.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: CTS Avoidance Buffer

If CTS protocol-level surveys are not conducted, CDFW advises that a minimum 50-foot no-disturbance buffer be delineated around all small mammal burrows in suitable upland refugia habitat within and adjacent to the Project site. Further, CDFW recommends potential or known breeding habitat within and/or adjacent to the Project site be delineated with a minimum 250-foot no-disturbance buffer during the breeding season. Both upland burrow and aquatic breeding no-disturbance buffers are intended to minimize impacts to CTS habitat and avoid take of individuals.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 3: CTS Take Authorization

As described above, the IS/PMND assumes presence of CTS, and Caltrans has determined that the Project cannot avoid potential take of CTS. As take cannot be avoided and thus authorization through the acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to comply with CESA, Caltrans will seek take authorization for CTS from CDFW through ITP acquisition.

Swainson's Hawk

The Project is within the known geographic range of Swainson's hawk (SWHA). SWHA are known to travel for miles to forage and exhibit high nest-site fidelity from year to year. SWHA are known to breed within the Central Valley of California and prefer to nest near and forage in alfalfa, fallow fields, field crops, and grassland habitats with a sufficient source of small mammals (CDFG 1994). Based on aerial imagery, there may be suitable perching and nesting trees within the Project vicinity, and the Project site contains suitable foraging habitat for SWHA. The NES identifies that suitable SWHA nesting habitat is not found within 500 feet of the Project site and lists protective buffers of 600 feet, distances which are unlikely to avoid take, as described below.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 4: SWHA Baseline Surveys

To evaluate potential Project impacts to this state-listed species, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct surveys for SWHA nesting habitat within at least ½ mile of the Project site as well as nest occupancy surveys if suitable nesting habitat is found within that distance, as part of the biological studies are conducted in support of the IS/PMND. CDFW recommends that the surveys follow the methodology developed by the SWHA Technical Advisory Committee which calls for habitat evaluation and surveys within a ½ mile radius of the Project site (SWHA TAC 2000).

Recommended Mitigation Measure 5: SWHA Pre-Construction Surveys

If suitable nesting habitat is found within ½ mile of the Project site and Project-specific activities will take place during the SWHA nesting season (i.e., March 1 through September 15), CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct surveys for nesting SWHA following the survey methodology developed by the SWHA Technical Advisory Committee (SWHA TAC 2000) the survey season immediately prior to initiation of Project activities.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 6: SWHA Avoidance Buffer

If Project-specific activities will take place during the SWHA nesting season (i.e., March 1 through September 15), and active SWHA nests are present, CDFW recommends a minimum ½-mile no-disturbance buffer be delineated and maintained around each nest, regardless of whether it was detected by surveys or observed incidentally. These buffers would remain in place until the breeding season has ended or until a qualified biologist has determined that the birds have fledged and are no longer reliant upon the nest or parental care for survival, to prevent nest abandonment and other take of SWHA as a result of Project activities.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 7: SWHA Take Authorization

CDFW also recommends that in the event an active SWHA nest is detected, and a ½-mile no-disturbance buffer is not feasible, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the Project and avoid take. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to comply with CESA.

Tricolored blackbird

The Project site is within the known geographic range of tricolored blackbird (TRBL) and historical and recent occurrences have been documented between ¾ and 5 miles of the Project site (CDFW 2026). In the San Joaquin Valley, TRBL historically bred within the vicinity of fresh water, primarily in marshy areas and important sites for nesting colonies included heavy growths

of cattails, tules, thistles, willows, blackberries, mustard, nettles, and salt cedar. Foraging typically occurs within flooded lands, grassy fields, and margins of ponds (Grinnel and Miller 1994). Based on aerial imagery, portions of the Project site and immediate vicinity could provide potential nesting and foraging habitat for TRBL, and the Project site appears to have similar habitat conditions as nearby TRBL records, including downstream on Hoods Creek (CDFW 2026). CDFW does not concur with the assessment in the NES that concludes that suitable nesting habitat for TRBL is not present within the Project site.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 8: TRBL Baseline Surveys

To evaluate potential Project impacts to TRBL, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct surveys for TRBL within at least 500 feet of the Project site as part of the biological studies are conducted in support of the IS/PMND.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 9: TRBL Pre-Construction Surveys

If Project-specific activities will take place during the TRBL nesting season (i.e., March 15 through June 15), CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct surveys for nesting TRBL within at least 500 feet of the Project site the season immediately prior to initiation of Project activities.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 10: TRBL Avoidance Buffer

If Project-specific activities will take place during the TRBL nesting season, and active TRBL nests are identified during surveys, consultation with CDFW is recommended for guidance on mitigation measures, such as avoidance, minimization, and mitigation. CDFW recommend avoidance buffers remain in place until the breeding season has ended or until a qualified biologist has determined that the birds have fledged and are no longer reliant upon the nest or parental care for survival.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 11: TRBL Take Authorization

CDFW also recommends that in the event an active TRBL nest is detected, and avoidance is not feasible, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the Project and avoid take. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to comply with CESA.

Western Burrowing Owl

The California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) approved western burrowing owl (BUOW) as a candidate for potential listing as a protected species under CESA on October 10, 2024, and published these findings in

the California Regulatory Notice Register on October 25, 2024. As such, BUOW is now a candidate under CESA and receives the same legal protection afforded to an endangered or threatened species (Fish & G. Code, §§ 2074.2 & 2085).

The Project site is within the known geographic range of BUOW, and there are recent and historical occurrences located within 10 miles of the Project site (CDFW 2026). BUOW typically inhabit open grasslands containing small mammal burrows, a requisite habitat feature used by BUOW for nesting and cover. BUOW may also use “man-made burrows” such as pipes or culverts. Based on aerial imagery the Project site and adjacent areas contain suitable habitat for BUOW nesting and foraging. The NES identifies that suitable BUOW habitat occurs within the Project site, but the IS/PMND does not address BUOW.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 12: BUOW Baseline Surveys

To evaluate potential Project impacts to BUOW, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct nesting and wintering surveys for BUOW following the 2012 Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (2012 Staff Report) (CDFG 2012) within at least 500 meters (1,640 feet) of the Project site as part of the biological studies are conducted in support of the IS/PMND.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 13: BUOW Pre-Construction Surveys

CDFW recommends assessing presence/absence of BUOW on the Project site, as well as a 500-meter buffer surrounding the Project site, by having a qualified biologist conduct surveys following the 2012 Staff Report the survey season immediately prior to Project initiation.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 14: BUOW Avoidance Buffer

Should a BUOW individual or known BUOW burrow (active or inactive) be detected, either during pre-construction surveys or construction activities, CDFW recommends that no-disturbance buffers, as outlined in the 2012 Staff Report, be implemented prior to and during any ground-disturbing activities. CDFW also recommends that these buffers be implemented for both wintering and breeding BUOW.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 15: BUOW Take Authorization

If a BUOW individual or known BUOW burrow (active or inactive) is detected, and the no-disturbance buffers outlined in the 2012 Staff Report are not feasible, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the Project and avoid take. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b), is necessary to comply with CESA.

Crotch's Bumble Bee

The Project site is within the known geographic range of the State candidate Crotch's bumble bee (CBB) and there are multiple historical occurrences near the Project Site (CDFW 2026). CBB inhabit a variety of habitats, including grasslands, scrublands, openings in woodlands, and areas with bare ground such as vacant lots, dirt roads, and levees (Xerces Society et al. 2018). CBB use requisite habitat elements for nesting, such as small mammal burrows and bunch/thatched grasses, which may be present in or near the Project site. The IS/PMND and the NES do not provide an assessment of potential Project impacts to CBB.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 16: CBB Baseline Surveys

CDFW recommends a qualified biologist conduct focused surveys for CBB and their requisite habitat features within and adjacent to the Project site following the methodology outlined in the "Survey Considerations for California Endangered Species Act Candidate Bumble Bee Species" (CDFW 2023), as part of the biological studies are conducted in support of the IS/PMND.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 17: CBB Pre-Construction Surveys

If suitable foraging habitat is present, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct focused surveys for CBB and their requisite habitat features within and adjacent to the Project site following the methodology outlined in the "Survey Considerations for California Endangered Species Act Candidate Bumble Bee Species" (CDFW 2023), during the blooming period immediately prior to Project initiation.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 18: CBB Avoidance Buffer

If CBB is detected, CDFW recommends that all small mammal burrows and thatched/bunch grasses be avoided by a minimum of 50 feet to avoid take and potentially significant impacts. If CBB are detected during surveys and ground-disturbing activities will occur during the overwintering to nesting period (October through August), consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement Project activities and avoid take. Any detection of CBB prior to or during Project implementation warrants consultation with CDFW to discuss how to avoid take.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 19: CBB Take Authorization

If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to comply with CESA.

Western Spadefoot

On September 24, 2025, the Commission received a petition to list the northern population of western spadefoot (WESP) as threatened species and the southern population of WESP as an endangered species under CESA. If the Commission takes action and WESP becomes listed as a Candidate for listing pursuant to CESA (possible in 2026) or ultimately becomes listed as threatened or endangered pursuant to CESA, it will receive the same legal protection afforded to an endangered or threatened species (Fish & G. Code, §§ 2074.2 & 2085).

As identified in the IS/PMND, the Project site is within the geographic range and has suitable habitat for WESP. The Project site and surrounding habitats may provide suitable habitat for breeding and/or dispersal. The IS/PMND describes that WESP may be present within the Project site, but that the stream and nearby ponds are not suitable breeding habitat. As described above for CTS, aerial imagery suggests that the stream may dry down sufficiently during some years, and one or more of the pools may stay wet long enough during some years, either of which could result in pools that support WESP breeding.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 20: WESP Pre-Construction Surveys

CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct focused surveys for WESP, using appropriate survey methodologies, prior to any ground-disturbing activities that may occur as part of the Project.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 21: WESP Avoidance Buffer

If burrows, cracks, loose soil areas or other refugia are found to be used by WESP during focused surveys, CDFW recommends avoidance whenever possible via delineation and observance of a 50-foot no-disturbance buffer around these resources, including all potential breeding habitat, which can include any areas that pool water for only a few weeks. CDFW also recommends avoidance of potential breeding habitat even when dry, since post-metamorphic WESP juveniles have a unique adaptation to the drying of their temporary breeding pools; they utilize the dried pond bottom as a refuge, burying themselves in the desiccation cracks and damp soil beneath the surface crust (Baumberger et al. 2020). If any life stage of WESP are observed within the Project site, Project activities in their immediate vicinity should cease, allowing individuals to leave the Project site on their own accord.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 22: WESP Take Authorization

Please note that implementation of the recommended WESP measures would help minimize impacts to WESP as required by CEQA but would not fully avoid impacts and thus take; additional measures would need to be implemented to avoid take of WESP. In the event that WESP becomes

protected under CESA, CDFW recommends early consultation to help identify if avoidance is feasible or if not, to initiate discussions regarding the need for ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b), to comply with CESA.

Editorial Comments and/or Suggestions

Quantification of Impacts and Mitigation: The IS/PMND includes quantifications of permanent and temporary impacts to CTS and other species, impact/mitigation ratios, and resulting quantification of compensatory mitigation acreage. Please note that as part of developing an ITP, CDFW will conduct an independent impact and compensatory mitigation analysis that may or may not match the IS/PMND. Additionally, if purchase of mitigation bank credits will be used to compensate for those impacts, the mitigation bank must be approved by CDFW to fulfil any ITP mitigation requirement.

CNDDDB: As identified in the CNDDDB Data Use Guidelines, CDFW requests that at scales larger (more zoomed in) than 1:350,000, the polygon layer should not be shown on a public map, such as Figure 5 (CNDDDB occurrences) in the NES. The NES is a publicly available document for the IS/PMND. Please note that the CNDDDB is populated by records through voluntary submissions of species detections. As a result, species may be present in locations not depicted in the CNDDDB, but where there is suitable habitat features capable of supporting species. A lack of an occurrence record in the CNDDDB does not mean a species is not present. To adequately assess any potential Project-related impacts to biological resources, surveys conducted by a qualified biologist during the appropriate survey period(s) using the appropriate protocol survey methodology are warranted to determine whether any special-status species are present at or near the Project site.

Cumulative Impacts: CDFW recommends that a cumulative impact analysis be conducted for all biological resources that will either be significantly or potentially significantly impacted by implementation of the Project, including those whose impacts are determined to be less than significant with mitigation incorporated or for those resources that are rare or in poor or declining health and will be impacted by the Project, even if those impacts are relatively small (i.e., less than significant). Cumulative impacts are recommended to be analyzed using an acceptable methodology to evaluate the impacts of this Project's incremental contribution to habitat loss and past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects on resources and be focused specifically on the resource, not the Project. The cumulative impacts analysis should specifically include all past, present, and foreseeable projects in the Central Valley area. An appropriate resource study area should also be identified and mapped for each resource being analyzed and utilized for this analysis. CDFW staff are available for consultation in support of cumulative impacts analyses as a trustee and responsible agency under CEQA.

Lake and Streambed Alteration: As identified in the IS/PMND, Project activities will substantially change or use material from the bed, bank, and channel of Hoods Creek. These activities are subject to CDFW's regulatory authority pursuant Fish and Game Code section 1600 et seq. Fish and Game Code section 1602 requires an entity to notify CDFW prior to commencing any activity that may (a) substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow of any river, stream, or lake; (b) substantially change or use any material from the bed, bank, or channel of any river, stream, or lake (including the removal of riparian vegetation); (c) deposit or dispose of debris, waste or other materials that could pass into any river, stream, or lake. "Any river, stream, or lake" includes those that are ephemeral or intermittent as well as those that are perennial and may include those that are highly modified such as canals and retention basins.

CDFW is required to comply with CEQA prior to issuance of a Final Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement; therefore, if the CEQA document approved for the Project does not adequately describe the Project and its impacts to lakes or streams, a subsequent CEQA analysis may be necessary for Final Streambed Alteration Agreement issuance. For information on notification requirements, please refer to CDFW's website (<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/LSA>) or contact the CDFW staff in the Caltrans Liaison Unit of the Central Region, listed below.

Nesting Birds: CDFW encourages that Project ground-disturbing activities occur during the bird non-nesting season; however, if ground- or vegetation-disturbing activities must occur during the nesting season (February 1st through September 15th), the Project applicant is responsible for ensuring that implementation of the Project does not result in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or relevant Fish and Game Code sections as referenced in this letter.

ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports and negative declarations be incorporated into a database, which may be used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations (Pub. Resources Code, § 21003, subd. (e)). Accordingly, please report any special-status species and natural communities detected during Project surveys to the CNDDDB. The CNDDDB field survey form can be found at the following link: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Submitting-Data>. The completed form can be mailed electronically to the CNDDDB at the following email address: CNDDDB@wildlife.ca.gov. The types of information reported to the CNDDDB can be found at the following link: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Plants-and-Animals>.

FILING FEES

The Project, as proposed, would have an impact on fish and/or wildlife, and assessment of filing fees is necessary. Fees are payable upon filing of the Notice of Determination by the Lead Agency and serve to help defray the cost of environmental review by CDFW. Payment of the fee is required in order for the underlying project approval to be operative, vested, and final (Cal. Code Regs, tit. 14, § 753.5; Fish & G. Code, § 711.4; Pub. Resources Code, § 21089).

CONCLUSION

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the IS/PMND to assist the Caltrans in identifying and mitigating Project impacts on biological resources. Please see the enclosed Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) table (Attachment 1) which corresponds with the recommended mitigation measures in this comment letter. If you have any questions, please contact Mindy Trask, Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist), at the address provided on this letterhead, by telephone at (559) 939-0282, or by electronic mail at Mary.Trask@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Julie A. Vance
Regional Manager

Attachment (MMRP)

ec: State Clearinghouse
Land Use and Climate Innovation
state.clearinghouse@lci.ca.gov

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occidentalis) as Endangered under the California Endangered Species Act. October 2018.

Attachment

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING
PROGRAM (MMRP)

PROJECT: Hoods Creek Bridge Replacement Project 10-1H230
Initial Study with Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration
State Clearinghouse No.: 2026020519

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE / STATUS/DATE/INITIALS

Before Disturbing Soil or Vegetation

Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: CTS Protocol Surveys
Recommended Mitigation Measure 3: CTS Take Authorization
Recommended Mitigation Measure 4: SWHA Baseline Surveys
Recommended Mitigation Measure 5: SWHA Pre-Construction Surveys
Recommended Mitigation Measure 7: SWHA Take Authorization
Recommended Mitigation Measure 8: TRBL Baseline Surveys
Recommended Mitigation Measure 9: TRBL Pre-Construction Surveys
Recommended Mitigation Measure 11: TRBL Take Authorization
Recommended Mitigation Measure 12: BUOW Baseline Surveys
Recommended Mitigation Measure 13: BUOW Pre-Construction Surveys
Recommended Mitigation Measure 15: BUOW Take Authorization
Recommended Mitigation Measure 16: CBB Baseline Surveys
Recommended Mitigation Measure 17: CBB Pre-Construction Surveys
Recommended Mitigation Measure 19: CBB Take Authorization
Recommended Mitigation Measure 20: WESP Pre-Construction Surveys
Recommended Mitigation Measure 22: WESP Take Authorization, if CESA
candidate species

During Construction

Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: CTS Avoidance Buffer
Recommended Mitigation Measure 6: SWHA Avoidance Buffer
Recommended Mitigation Measure 10: TRBL Avoidance Buffer
Recommended Mitigation Measure 14: BUOW Avoidance Buffer
Recommended Mitigation Measure 18: CBB Avoidance Buffer
Recommended Mitigation Measure 21: WESP Avoidance Buffer

Responses to Comments from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Thank you for your interest and comments on this environmental document for the Hoods Creek Bridge Replacement project.

The following section contains responses to these comments, divided by topic. These responses were prepared by Jason Meigs, Caltrans District 10 Environmental Scientist (Biologist) on March 25, 2026, with additional input from Alexandros Xides, Caltrans District 10 Environmental Scientist (Generalist).

Comment 1 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

CDFW recommends that the following additional information be addressed in the Mitigated Negative Declaration, including proposed avoidance, minimization, and compensatory measures prior to adoption by Caltrans.

California Tiger Salamander

As identified in the IS/PMND, the Project site is within the geographic range and has suitable habitat for California tiger salamander (CTS) and the Project will result in temporary and permanent impacts to CTS upland habitat. CDFW concurs with this finding, as well as the determination that an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) with CDFW is warranted, pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 2081, subdivision (b). The IS/PMND describes that Hoods Creek is not suitable potential breeding habitat for CTS due to the presence of predatory bullfrogs (*Rana catesbeiana*) and high temperatures. However, the presence of bullfrogs and high temperatures may not preclude the potential for CTS breeding within the Project reach of Hoods Creek or nearby ephemeral ponds located between 0.1 and at least 1.3 miles of the Project site.

Response to Comment 1 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Prior to the publication of the January 2026 Initial Study with Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration and November 2025 Natural Environment Study, additional survey efforts associated with biological resource monitoring for cultural resources excavation activities were conducted between April 7, 2025 and April 25, 2025. These survey efforts resulted in updates to baseline conditions in Hoods Creek, including the project Action Area and the vicinity approximately 1,000 feet around it.

In addition to observation of bullfrog adults and larvae, surveys also observed populations of largemouth bass, carp, mosquitofish, and crayfish. These predators remain densely congregated in pools during summer draw-down events. Introductions of non-native fish have been implicated in the loss of salamanders from aquatic sites. Caltrans recognizes that California tiger salamander may attempt to enter Hoods Creek; all aquatic life stages California tiger salamander would be exposed to a suite of non-native predators. Caltrans recognizes that even under these conditions, all aquatic life stages of the species may not be consumed. However, the likelihood that Hoods Creek can support California tiger salamander breeding is very low. Caltrans continues to maintain that Hoods Creek does not represent suitable California tiger salamander breeding habitat, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has concurred with this determination in the Biological Opinion issued on May 14, 2026.

Comment 2 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

CTS have adapted to warm temperatures and ponds that dry out early in the spring by breeding early and metamorphizing faster than previously considered (O'Brien and Helm 2025). The fact that researchers have identified that bullfrogs prey on CTS (e.g., Anderson 1968, Morey and Guinn 1992, Shaffer and Fisher 1991), indicates the co-occurrence of the species and does not mean that all CTS are consumed and killed by bullfrogs. Bullfrogs have been found in at least four known CTS breeding ponds in Santa Barbara County (USFWS 2016) and at a mitigation site in Madera County (CDFW, in-house data). The NES describes that Hoods Creek and the closest evaluated pools do not have suitable hydrology for CTS breeding. However, aerial imagery suggests that the stream may dry down sufficiently during some years, and one or more of the pools may stay wet long enough during some years, either of which could result in pools that support CTS breeding.

Response to Comment 2 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Caltrans documented in Natural Environment Study that Hoods Creek typically draws down to a series of pools during most summer seasons. As noted above, Hoods Creek supports several non-native predators that are forced to congregate within these pools during draw-down events. The likelihood that Hoods Creek can support California tiger salamander breeding is very low.

Comment 3 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:**Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: CTS Protocol Surveys**

CDFW recommends a qualified biologist assess presence/absence of CTS breeding in suitable habitat areas located within a minimum 250-foot buffer of the of Project site by conducting protocol-level surveys in accordance with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) "Interim Guidance on Site Assessment and Field Surveys for Determining Presence or a Negative Finding of the California Tiger Salamander" (USFWS 2003). The protocol-level surveys for CTS require more than one survey season and are dependent upon sufficient rainfall to complete. Consultation with CDFW and the USFWS is recommended well in advance of beginning the surveys and prior to any planned vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities. Please be advised that protocol-level survey results are viable for two years after the results are reviewed by CDFW.

Response to Comment 3 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Caltrans concluded formal Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the assumption that the California tiger salamander is present within the Action Area. Therefore, the implementation of a protocol-level survey to determine California tiger salamander presence is not warranted.

Grazed annual grasslands within the Action Area are considered as potential upland habitat for California tiger salamander because potentially suitable aquatic breeding habitat for the species occurs within approximately 1.24-miles of the Action Area. Surveys within the Action Area and within 1,000 feet of the Action Area support extensive small mammal (voles, mice, gophers) burrows and support a number of medium-sized mammal (ground squirrel) burrows.

Site surveys were performed within approximately 1,000 feet of the project Action Area during April 2025. Seasonal drainage features within approximately 1,000 feet of the Action Area that may potentially be suitable for California tiger salamander breeding include seasonally inundated swales, seasonally saturated depressions, and side-pools.

Comment 4 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: CTS Avoidance Buffer

If CTS protocol-level surveys are not conducted, CDFW advises that a minimum 50-foot no-disturbance buffer be delineated around all small mammal burrows in suitable upland refugia habitat within and adjacent to the Project site. Further, CDFW recommends potential or known breeding habitat within and/or adjacent to the Project site be delineated with a minimum 250-foot no-disturbance buffer during the breeding season. Both upland burrow and aquatic breeding no-disturbance buffers are intended to minimize impacts to CTS habitat and avoid take of individuals.

Response to Comment 4 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

As discussed above, California tiger salamander is assumed to be present within and adjacent to the project Action Area and no protocol levels for determining presence of California tiger salamander will be conducted. Until further consultation with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Caltrans will observe all conservation measures included in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion obtained on May 14, 2026 and will incorporate these conservation measures into project specifications. The majority of California tiger salamander upland habitat within the project construction footprint is expected to be disturbed. The feasibility of establishing protective buffers around burrows was discussed during consultation and a project footprint exclusion concept was determined as a

more feasible solution. Specific to limiting disturbance to California tiger salamander individuals, upland habitat, and potential aquatic breeding habitat are the following measures:

Pre-construction Surveys: An additional avoidance and minimization measure, BIO-8 (Pre-Construction Surveys for California Tiger Salamander) has been added to Section 2.1.4 and Appendix B of this environmental document. This measure specifies the need for pre-construction surveys for California tiger salamander. The surveys will take place prior to the installation of exclusion fencing (see Measure BIO-9, discussed below) to maximize clearance of the construction zone and to minimize the risk of individuals becoming trapped within the fenced area. Caltrans will notify the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the survey results (even if there are no detections). If construction stops for a period of two weeks or longer, a new pre-construction survey of these work areas (including staging areas) will be completed no more than 14 days prior to work restarting.

Exclusion Fencing: As discussed in Measure BIO-9 (Temporary Exclusion Fencing) in Appendix B of this environmental document, Caltrans will install exclusion fencing around the limits of the project footprint prior to the start of work. Additional details have been added to Measure BIO-9 in Appendix B to specify that fencing will be installed immediately following pre-construction surveys, will be of a type or design that will not entangle California tiger salamander, and will be three feet tall and be buried at least six inches below the ground to prevent the tiger salamander from burrowing or moving under the structure. It will have a minimum four-inch lip at the top facing away from the work area to deter climbing. All fencing will be inspected regularly, maintained in good condition throughout construction, and removed following project completion.

Coverboards: As discussed in Measure BIO-10 (Prevent Entrapment) in Appendix B of this environmental document, Caltrans will place plywood coverboards at regular intervals along the construction side of the exclusion fencing to provide refuge opportunities for any tiger salamanders or other wildlife that become trapped within the work areas. These will be checked daily; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-approved biologist will move any individuals found to a suitable burrow in appropriate habitat outside of the construction area.

Comment 5 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 3: CTS Take Authorization

As described above, the IS/PMND assumes presence of CTS, and Caltrans has determined that the Project cannot avoid potential take of CTS. As take cannot be avoided and thus authorization through the acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to

comply with CESA, Caltrans will seek take authorization for CTS from CDFW through ITP acquisition.

Response to Comment 5 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Because the project is expected to result in “take” (defined by California Fish and Game Code Section 86 as “to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill”) of California tiger salamander in the form of mortality, Caltrans will seek take authorization for California tiger salamander from California Department of Fish and Wildlife through the acquisition of an Incidental Take Permit. The permit will be obtained during the design phase of the project, prior to construction.

Comment 6 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Swainson’s Hawk

The Project is within the known geographic range of Swainson’s hawk (SWHA). SWHA are known to travel for miles to forage and exhibit high nest-site fidelity from year to year. SWHA are known to breed within the Central Valley of California and prefer to nest near and forage in alfalfa, fallow fields, field crops, and grassland habitats with a sufficient source of small mammals (CDFG 1994). Based on aerial imagery, there may be suitable perching and nesting trees within the Project vicinity, and the Project site contains suitable foraging habitat for SWHA.

Response to Comment 6 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Swainson’s hawk have been observed foraging over the project Action Area and vicinity. A pair of isolated black locust trees occur on the south side of State Route 4, east of Hoods Creek immediately adjacent to the Action Area. These are unlikely to support raptor nests, no evidence of past raptor nests have been observed in these trees (nesting materials), and no raptors have been observed nesting at these specimens during the history of project survey effort or during weekly drive-by surveys of the project site by the assigned biologist along the biologist’s commute route.

Trees that may be suitable for Swainson’s hawk or raptor nesting are located outside of the project Action Area; approximately 0.65-mile (3,250 feet) southwest associated with residences along Dunton Road and within 0.15-mile (820 feet) north of the Action Area along Hoods Creek.

Comment 7 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

The NES identifies that suitable SWHA nesting habitat is not found within 500 feet of the Project site and lists protective buffers of 600 feet, distances which are unlikely to avoid take, as described below.

Response to Comment 7 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Please see the above response regarding distances to potential nesting habitat. In the event an active Swainson's hawk nest is detected during construction surveys or monitoring, and a 0.5-mile no-disturbance buffer is not feasible, Caltrans will consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take.

Comment 8 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 4: SWHA Baseline Surveys

To evaluate potential Project impacts to this state-listed species, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct surveys for SWHA nesting habitat within at least ½ mile of the Project site as well as nest occupancy surveys if suitable nesting habitat is found within that distance, as part of the biological studies are conducted in support of the IS/PMND. CDFW recommends that the surveys follow the methodology developed by the SWHA Technical Advisory Committee which calls for habitat evaluation and surveys within a ½ mile radius of the Project site (SWHA TAC 2000).

Response to Comment 8 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Caltrans has not observed nesting raptors at trees within the immediate vicinity of the project area (black locust trees adjacent to Action Area, oaks and willows located along Hoods Creek north of the Action Area) during the history of project survey effort or during weekly drive-by surveys of the project site by the assigned biologist. In the event an active Swainson's hawk nest is detected during construction surveys or monitoring, and a 0.5-mile no-disturbance buffer is not feasible, Caltrans will consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take.

Comment 9 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 5: SWHA Pre-Construction Surveys

If suitable nesting habitat is found within ½ mile of the Project site and Project-specific activities will take place during the SWHA nesting season (i.e., March 1 through September 15), CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct surveys for nesting SWHA following the survey methodology

developed by the SWHA Technical Advisory Committee (SWHA TAC 2000) the survey season immediately prior to initiation of Project activities.

Response to Comment 9 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

As indicated in Measures BIO-21, BIO-22, and BIO-23 in Appendix B of this environmental document, Caltrans will conduct pre-construction surveys and construction-phase monitoring for nesting Swainson's hawk. The language of Measure BIO-21 (Migratory Birds and Raptors – Pre-Construction Surveys During Nesting Season) has been adjusted to include that Swainson's hawk pre-construction surveys will be conducted in accessible areas within approximately 0.5-mile of the project Action Area.

Comment 10 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 6: SWHA Avoidance Buffer

If Project-specific activities will take place during the SWHA nesting season (i.e., March 1 through September 15), and active SWHA nests are present, CDFW recommends a minimum ½-mile no-disturbance buffer be delineated and maintained around each nest, regardless of whether it was detected by surveys or observed incidentally. These buffers would remain in place until the breeding season has ended or until a qualified biologist has determined that the birds have fledged and are no longer reliant upon the nest or parental care for survival, to prevent nest abandonment and other take of SWHA as a result of Project activities.

Response to Comment 10 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Please see the response to Comment 7 above.

Comment 11 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 7: SWHA Take Authorization

CDFW also recommends that in the event an active SWHA nest is detected, and a ½-mile no-disturbance buffer is not feasible, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the Project and avoid take. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to comply with CESA.

Response to Comment 11 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Please see the response to Comment 7 above.

Comment 12 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Tricolored blackbird

The Project site is within the known geographic range of tricolored blackbird (TRBL) and historical and recent occurrences have been documented between $\frac{3}{4}$ and 5 miles of the Project site (CDFW 2026). In the San Joaquin Valley, TRBL historically bred within the vicinity of fresh water, primarily in marshy areas and important sites for nesting colonies included heavy growths of cattails, tules, thistles, willows, blackberries, mustard, nettles, and salt cedar.

Response to Comment 12 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Caltrans is familiar with nesting habitats of tricolored blackbird, and the assigned Caltrans biologist has observed several tricolored blackbird nesting sites in the California coast ranges, Central Valley and Sierra Nevada foothills.

Comment 13 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Foraging typically occurs within flooded lands, grassy fields, and margins of ponds (Grinnel and Miller 1994). Based on aerial imagery, portions of the Project site and immediate vicinity could provide potential nesting and foraging habitat for TRBL, and the Project site appears to have similar habitat conditions as nearby TRBL records, including downstream on Hoods Creek (CDFW 2026). CDFW does not concur with the assessment in the NES that concludes that suitable nesting habitat for TRBL is not present within the Project site.

Response to Comment 13 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

The project Action Area does not support heavy growth of cattails, tules, thistles, willows, blackberries, mustard, nettles, salt cedar or other dense vegetation suitable for supporting nesting colonies of tricolored blackbird. Surveyed areas within approximately 1,000 feet of the project Action area do not support heavy growths of vegetation suitable for supporting nesting colonies of tricolored blackbird.

The nearest available suitable nesting habitat occurs approximately 0.65-mile (3,250 feet) southwest associated with residences along Dunton Road.

Comment 14 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 8: TRBL Baseline Surveys

To evaluate potential Project impacts to TRBL, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct surveys for TRBL within at least 500 feet of the Project site as part of the biological studies are conducted in support of the IS/PMND.

Response to Comment 14 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Biological surveys were conducted for the Natural Environment Study occurred between January 2021 and August 2024, including survey effort during the tricolored blackbird nesting season, and failed to detect tricolored blackbird individuals, colonies or nesting sites within or immediately adjacent to the project Action Area. Furthermore, intensive biological survey effort occurred within 1,000 feet of the project Action area between April 7, 2025 and April 25, 2025, during the height of tricolored blackbird nesting season for Central California also failed to detect tricolored blackbird within the vicinity of project Action Area. Weekly drive-by surveys of the project site by the assigned biologist have failed to detect tricolored blackbird within the vicinity of State Route 4 and Hoods Creek.

Comment 15 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 9: TRBL Pre-Construction Surveys

If Project-specific activities will take place during the TRBL nesting season (i.e., March 15 through June 15), CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct surveys for nesting TRBL within at least 500 feet of the Project site the season immediately prior to initiation of Project activities.

Response to Comment 15 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

As described in Measure BIO-21 (Migratory Birds and Raptors – Pre-Construction Surveys During Nesting Season) in Appendix B of this environmental document, Caltrans will conduct pre-construction surveys for nesting migratory birds and raptors, including tricolored blackbird. Additional language has been added to Measure BIO-21 to specify that Caltrans will conduct tricolored blackbird pre-construction surveys in accessible areas within approximately 500 feet of the project Action Area.

In the event an active tricolored blackbird nest is detected during construction surveys or monitoring, and a 500-foot no-disturbance buffer is not feasible, Caltrans will consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take.

Comment 16 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 10: TRBL Avoidance Buffer

If Project-specific activities will take place during the TRBL nesting season, and active TRBL nests are identified during surveys, consultation with CDFW is recommended for guidance on mitigation measures, such as avoidance, minimization, and mitigation. CDFW recommend avoidance buffers remain in place until the breeding season has ended or until a qualified biologist has determined that the birds have fledged and are no longer reliant upon the nest or parental care for survival.

Response to Comment 16 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Please see the response to Comment 15 above.

Comment 17 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 11: TRBL Take Authorization

CDFW also recommends that in the event an active TRBL nest is detected, and avoidance is not feasible, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the Project and avoid take. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to comply with CESA.

Response to Comment 17 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

In the event an active tricolored blackbird nest is detected during construction surveys or monitoring, and a 500-foot no-disturbance buffer is not feasible, Caltrans will consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take. Caltrans understands that California Fish and Game Code Section 2081 consultation is required if it is determined that take cannot be avoided.

Comment 18 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Western Burrowing Owl

The California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) approved western burrowing owl (BUOW) as a candidate for potential listing as a protected species under CESA on October 10, 2024, and published these findings in the California Regulatory Notice Register on October 25, 2024. As such, BUOW is now a candidate under CESA and receives the same legal protection afforded to an endangered or threatened species (Fish & G. Code, §§ 2074.2 & 2085).

The Project site is within the known geographic range of BUOW, and there are recent and historical occurrences located within 10 miles of the Project

site (CDFW 2026). BUOW typically inhabit open grasslands containing small mammal burrows, a requisite habitat feature used by BUOW for nesting and cover. BUOW may also use “man-made burrows” such as pipes or culverts. Based on aerial imagery the Project site and adjacent areas contain suitable habitat for BUOW nesting and foraging. The NES identifies that suitable BUOW habitat occurs within the Project site, but the IS/PMND does not address BUOW.

Response to Comment 18 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Section 2.1.4 of this environmental document has been updated to match the language in the Natural Environment Study and discuss western burrowing owl suitable habitat in the project Action Area.

Comment 19 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 12: BUOW Baseline Surveys

To evaluate potential Project impacts to BUOW, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct nesting and wintering surveys for BUOW following the 2012 Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (2012 Staff Report) (CDFG 2012) within at least 500 meters (1,640 feet) of the Project site as part of the biological studies are conducted in support of the IS/PMND.

Response to Comment 19 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Caltrans recognizes that the project Action Area and vicinity contain suitable habitat for western burrowing owl nesting and foraging. Biological surveys conducted for the Natural Environment Study occurred between January 2021 and August 2024, including survey effort during the western burrowing owl nesting season, failed to detect western burrowing owl individuals, colonies or nesting sites within or immediately adjacent to the project Action Area. Furthermore, intensive biological survey effort occurred within 1,000 feet of the Action Area also failed to detect western burrowing owl within the vicinity of project Action Area. Weekly drive-by surveys of the project site by the assigned biologist have failed to detect western burrowing owl within the vicinity of State Route 4 and Hoods Creek.

Comment 20 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 13: BUOW Pre-Construction Surveys

CDFW recommends assessing presence/absence of BUOW on the Project site, as well as a 500-meter buffer surrounding the Project site, by having a qualified biologist conduct surveys following the 2012 Staff Report the survey season immediately prior to Project initiation.

Response to Comment 20 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

An additional avoidance and minimization measure, BIO-28 (Pre-Construction Surveys for Western Burrowing Owl), has been included in Section 2.1.4 and Appendix B of this environmental document.

Caltrans will conduct pre-construction surveys within accessible areas within approximately 1,640 feet of the project Action Area and will conduct construction-phase monitoring for nesting and/or active western burrowing owl burrows. In the event an active western burrowing owl nest or burrow is detected during construction surveys or monitoring, and a 1,640-foot no-disturbance buffer is not feasible, Caltrans will consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take.

Comment 21 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 14: BUOW Avoidance Buffer

Should a BUOW individual or known BUOW burrow (active or inactive) be detected, either during pre-construction surveys or construction activities, CDFW recommends that no-disturbance buffers, as outlined in the 2012 Staff Report, be implemented prior to and during any ground-disturbing activities. CDFW also recommends that these buffers be implemented for both wintering and breeding BUOW.

Response to Comment 21 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Please see the response to Comment 20 above.

Comment 22 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 15: BUOW Take Authorization

If a BUOW individual or known BUOW burrow (active or inactive) is detected, and the no-disturbance buffers outlined in the 2012 Staff Report are not feasible, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the Project and avoid take. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b), is necessary to comply with CESA.

Response to Comment 22 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Please see the response to Comment 20 above.

Caltrans understands that as a California Endangered Species Act Candidate, the western burrowing owl receives the same legal protection afforded to an endangered or threatened species.

Comment 23 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Crotch's Bumble Bee

The Project site is within the known geographic range of the State candidate Crotch's bumble bee (CBB) and there are multiple historical occurrences near the Project Site (CDFW 2026). CBB inhabit a variety of habitats, including grasslands, scrublands, openings in woodlands, and areas with bare ground such as vacant lots, dirt roads, and levees (Xerces Society et al. 2018). CBB use requisite habitat elements for nesting, such as small mammal burrows and bunch/thatched grasses, which may be present in or near the Project site. The IS/PMND and the NES do not provide an assessment of potential Project impacts to CBB.

Response to Comment 23 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Crotch's bumble bee did not appear on the California Natural Diversity Database list of sensitive species for the Bachelor Valley U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute quadrangle and thus was not incorporated into discussion in the Natural Environment Study. The closest recorded occurrence of Crotch's bumble bee occurs near the City of Lodi, over 32 miles northwest of the project Action Area. Caltrans is aware that lack of occurrence records does not mean a species is not present. Caltrans is aware that the project Action Area falls within the range of Crotch's bumble bee and that potential foraging and nesting habitat occur within the project Action Area.

Additional language has been added to Section 2.1.4 of this environmental document to discuss Crotch's bumble bee.

Comment 24 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 16: CBB Baseline Surveys

CDFW recommends a qualified biologist conduct focused surveys for CBB and their requisite habitat features within and adjacent to the Project site following the methodology outlined in the "Survey Considerations for California Endangered Species Act Candidate Bumble Bee Species" (CDFW 2023), as part of the biological studies are conducted in support of the IS/PMND.

Response to Comment 24 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Caltrans is aware that the project Action Area falls within the range of Crotch's bumble bee and that potential foraging and nesting habitat occur within the project Action Area.

An additional avoidance and minimization measure, BIO-29 (Pre-Construction Surveys for Crotch's Bumble Bee), has been included in Section 2.1.4 and Appendix B of this environmental document.

Caltrans will conduct pre-construction surveys within accessible areas within approximately 500 feet of the project Action Area and will conduct construction-phase monitoring for foraging bumble bees and active bumble bee hives. In the event Crotch's bumble bee is detected or if an active bumble bee hive is detected during construction surveys or monitoring, Caltrans will consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take.

Comment 25 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 17: CBB Pre-Construction Surveys

If suitable foraging habitat is present, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct focused surveys for CBB and their requisite habitat features within and adjacent to the Project site following the methodology outlined in the "Survey Considerations for California Endangered Species Act Candidate Bumble Bee Species" (CDFW 2023), during the blooming period immediately prior to Project initiation.

Response to Comment 25 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Please see the response to Comment 24 above.

Comment 26 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 18: CBB Avoidance Buffer

If CBB is detected, CDFW recommends that all small mammal burrows and thatched/bunch grasses be avoided by a minimum of 50 feet to avoid take and potentially significant impacts. If CBB are detected during surveys and ground-disturbing activities will occur during the overwintering to nesting period (October through August), consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement Project activities and avoid take. Any detection of CBB prior to or during Project implementation warrants consultation with CDFW to discuss how to avoid take.

Response to Comment 26 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Please see the response to Comment 24 above.

Comment 27 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 19: CBB Take Authorization

If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the acquisition of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to comply with CESA.

Response to Comment 27 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

In the event Crotch's bumble bee is detected or if an active bumble bee hive is detected during construction surveys or monitoring, Caltrans will consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take.

Caltrans understands that California Fish and Game Code Section 2081 consultation is required if it is determined that take cannot be avoided. Caltrans understands that as a California Endangered Species Act Candidate, the Crotch's bumble bee receives the same legal protection afforded to an endangered or threatened species.

Comment 28 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Western Spadefoot

On September 24, 2025, the Commission received a petition to list the northern population of western spadefoot (WESP) as threatened species and the southern population of WESP as an endangered species under CESA. If the Commission takes action and WESP becomes listed as a Candidate for listing pursuant to CESA (possible in 2026) or ultimately becomes listed as threatened or endangered pursuant to CESA, it will receive the same legal protection afforded to an endangered or threatened species (Fish & G. Code, §§ 2074.2 & 2085).

As identified in the IS/PMND, the Project site is within the geographic range and has suitable habitat for WESP. The Project site and surrounding habitats may provide suitable habitat for breeding and/or dispersal. The IS/PMND describes that WESP may be present within the Project site, but that the stream and nearby ponds are not suitable breeding habitat. As described above for CTS, aerial imagery suggests that the stream may dry down sufficiently during some years, and one or more of the pools may stay wet long enough during some years, either of which could result in pools that support WESP breeding.

Response to Comment 28 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

In addition to observation of bullfrog adults and larvae, surveys also observed populations of largemouth bass, carp, mosquitofish, and crayfish within Hoods Creek. These predators remain densely congregated in pools during summer draw-down events. Caltrans recognizes that if western spadefoot may attempt to enter Hoods Creek, all aquatic life stages of western spadefoot would be exposed to a suite of non-native predators. Caltrans also recognizes that, even under these conditions, all aquatic life stages of the species may not be consumed.

Additionally, the likelihood that Hoods Creek can support western spadefoot breeding is very low. Caltrans continues to maintain that Hoods Creek does not represent suitable western spadefoot breeding habitat.

Site surveys were performed within approximately 1,000 feet of the project Action Area during April 2025. Seasonal drainage features within approximately 1,000 feet of the Action Area that may potentially be suitable for western spadefoot breeding include seasonally inundated swales, seasonally saturated depressions, and side-pools. Western spadefoot spend the majority of their lives in uplands. Due to the proximity of potentially suitable aquatic breeding habitat, uplands within the project Action Area are considered potentially occupied by western spadefoot.

Comment 29 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 20: WESP Pre-Construction Surveys

CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct focused surveys for WESP, using appropriate survey methodologies, prior to any ground-disturbing activities that may occur as part of the Project.

Response to Comment 29 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Caltrans has not detected life stages of western spadefoot during the project's survey history.

Measure BIO-18 (Western Spadefoot – Pre-Construction Surveys) in Appendix B of this environmental document has been updated to specify that pre-construction surveys for western spadefoot will be conducted in accessible areas within approximately 500 feet of the project Action Area. Construction monitoring for the species is described in an existing avoidance and minimization measure, BIO-20 (Western Spadefoot – Construction Monitoring).

Comment 30 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 21: WESP Avoidance Buffer

If burrows, cracks, loose soil areas or other refugia are found to be used by WESP during focused surveys, CDFW recommends avoidance whenever possible via delineation and observance of a 50-foot no-disturbance buffer around these resources, including all potential breeding habitat, which can include any areas that pool water for only a few weeks. CDFW also recommends avoidance of potential breeding habitat even when dry, since post-metamorphic WESP juveniles have a unique adaptation to the drying of their temporary breeding pools; they utilize the dried pond bottom as a refuge, burying themselves in the desiccation cracks and damp soil beneath the surface crust (Baumberger et al. 2020). If any life stage of WESP are observed within the Project site, Project activities in their immediate vicinity should cease, allowing individuals to leave the Project site on their own accord.

Response to Comment 30 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

As noted for California tiger salamander, the feasibility of establishing protective buffers around burrows is problematic for project construction and a project footprint exclusion concept was determined in coordination with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a more feasible solution. The use of exclusion fence and coverboard arrays described in the response to the California tiger salamander comments above will function for both California tiger salamander and western spadefoot, preventing these species from entering the construction zone and managing the relocation of animals potentially found within the construction zone.

Caltrans will conduct pre-construction surveys for western spadefoot within accessible areas within approximately 500 feet of the project Action Area and will conduct construction-phase monitoring for western spadefoot. In the event that western spadefoot is detected during construction surveys or monitoring, Caltrans will consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take.

Comment 31 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

Recommended Mitigation Measure 22: WESP Take Authorization

Please note that implementation of the recommended WESP measures would help minimize impacts to WESP as required by CEQA but would not fully avoid impacts and thus take; additional measures would need to be implemented to avoid take of WESP. In the event that WESP becomes protected under CESA, CDFW recommends early consultation to help identify if avoidance is feasible or if not, to initiate discussions regarding the need for

ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b), to comply with CESA.

Response to Comment 31 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

In the event that western spadefoot is detected during construction surveys or monitoring, Caltrans will consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take. Caltrans understands that if western spadefoot becomes a California Endangered Species Act Candidate, the species will receive the same legal protection afforded to an endangered or threatened species.

List of Technical Studies Bound Separately (Volume 2)

Air Quality Memorandum

Climate Change Study

Community Impact Assessment Memorandum

District Preliminary Geotechnical Report

Energy Analysis Technical Memorandum

Historical Property Survey Report

- Archaeological Evaluation Report
- Archaeological Survey Report

Initial Site Assessment

Location Hydraulic Study

Natural Environment Study

Noise Compliance Study

Paleontological Identification Report

Section 4(f) Memorandum

Visual Impact Assessment Questionnaire

Water Quality Assessment Report

To obtain a copy of one or more of these technical studies/reports or the Initial Study, please send your request to:

Laura Cook
District 10 Environmental Division
California Department of Transportation
1976 East Doctor Martin Luther King Junior Boulevard, Stockton, CA 95205

Or send your request via email to: Laura.Cook@dot.ca.gov
Or call: 209- 662-2261

Please provide the following information in your request:

Project title: Hoods Creek Bridge Replacement

General location information: East of Farmington on State Route 4

District number-county code-route-post mile: 10-STA-4-7.1/7.4

Project ID number: 10-1H230 / 1020000178