2.4.4 Animal Species

2.4.4.1 Regulatory Setting

Federal laws and regulations relevant to wildlife include the following:

- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, are responsible for implementing these laws.

State laws and regulations relevant to wildlife include the following:

- California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)
- Sections 1600–1603 of the California Fish and Game Code
- Sections 4150 and 4152 of the California Fish and Game Code

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is responsible for implementing these laws.

This section discusses potential impacts and permit requirements associated with animals not listed or proposed for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act or the California Endangered Species Act. Species listed or proposed for listing as threatened or endangered are discussed in Section 2.4.5, *Threatened and Endangered Species*. All other special-status animal species are discussed here, including U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration candidate species and CDFW fully protected species and species of special concern.

2.4.4.2 Affected Environment

This section is based on the Natural Environment Study (Minimal Impacts) prepared for the Project (Caltrans 2025). Based on a literature review and habitat assessment (Figure 2.4.4-1), the Biological Study Area (BSA) contains suitable habitat for the special-status animal species that are listed in Table 2.4.4-1 and described after the table. None of these species was observed during the January 11, 2024, biological survey, although previous monitoring during construction of the Interstate (I-) 5 widening project in 2021–2022 reported observations of yellow warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) and western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*) in Aliso Creek. These species have potential to occur in habitats associated with Aliso Creek, which is within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA but outside the Project's construction footprint.

Birds

- **Southwestern Willow Flycatcher** – Southwestern willow flycatcher (SWFL) is a small, insectivorous passerine that migrates north in the spring from South America, Mexico, and Central America to breed in the southwestern desert riparian habitats of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. SWFL occurs in riparian woodland habitat that is characterized by a dense growth of willows (*Salix* sp.), mulefat (*Baccharis salicifolia*), arrowweed (*Pluchea* sp.), cottonwood (*Populus* sp.), sycamore (*Platanus* sp.), and tamarisk (*Tamarix* p.). The southwestern subspecies of willow flycatcher was federally listed as endangered in February 1995 and still listed as endangered as of 2024. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. Although the willow riparian habitat present in the BSA may provide suitable foraging habitat for this species, it is 2,700 feet away from the impact area.
- **Least Bell's Vireo** – Least Bell's vireo (LBVI) occupies a variety of habitats, including riparian habitat, mesquite scrub within arroyos, palm groves, and hedgerows bordering agriculture and residential areas. This species is listed as endangered by CDFW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. LBVI generally nests in early successional stages of riparian habitats, with nest sites frequently located in willows that are between 4 and 10 years of age or in patches of mulefat scrub. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. Although the willow riparian habitat present in the BSA may provide suitable foraging habitat for this species, it is 2,700 feet away from the impact area.
- **Coastal California Gnatcatcher** – Coastal California gnatcatcher (CAGN) is a small, blue-gray insectivorous songbird. CAGN is an obligate resident of lower-elevation coastal, Riversidean, or Venturan sage scrub habitats in Southern California from Ventura County to the north and San Diego County to the south. This species' breeding habitat consists of moderately dense coastal sage scrub associated with shallow-sloping, arid hillsides, mesas, and washes, generally occurring below 2,000 feet in elevation. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. Although the coastal sage scrub habitat present in the BSA may provide suitable foraging or nesting habitat for CAGN, it is 2,700 feet away from the impact area.
- **Cooper's Hawk** – Cooper's hawks are medium-sized hawks that feed mostly on birds and small mammals. The species inhabits fields, meadows, grasslands, forests, woodlands, coasts, shrublands, thickets, and urban and suburban habitat. This species is on the CDFW Watch List, which includes taxa that were previously Special Species of Concern but do not currently meet Species of Special Concern criteria. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. However, numerous tall trees, including eucalyptus trees, pine trees, and willow trees, in the BSA may provide foraging or nesting habitat for this species.

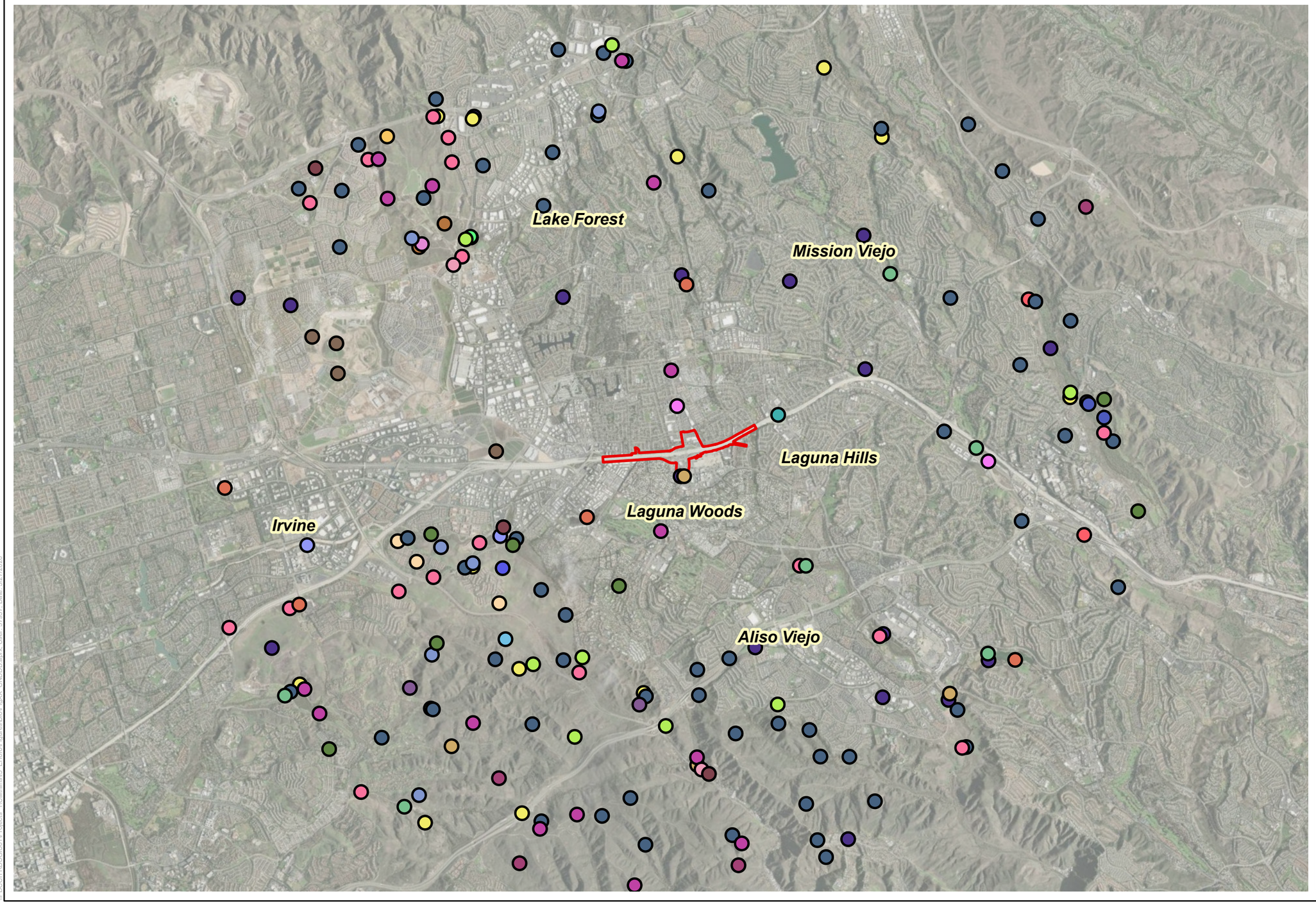

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Figure 2.4.4-1

I-5 El Toro Road Interchange Project
CNDDB Animal Occurrences

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Table 2.4.4-1. Listed and Proposed Animal Species Potentially Occurring or Known to Occur in the Project Area

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
Insects/Invertebrates/Crustaceans					
Crotch bumble bee	*Bombus crotchii*	SCE	Uncommon species of coastal California east toward the Sierra Nevada; select food plan genera include *Antirrhinum, Phacelia, Clarkia, Dendromecon, Eschscholzia,* and *Eriogonum.* Also, like lotus, *Encelia* sp., milk weed, and nonnative grassland. Do not prefer dense nonnative vegetation. Nest in the ground but are not limited by compact soils unless no rodent burrows or crevices are present. Highly affected by urbanization; unlikely to be found in fragmented habitats and more likely to be found in large undisturbed areas or sites with direct connections to large undisturbed areas.	HP	Not expected to occur. Coastal sage scrub habitat in the BSA is fragmented, outside of the Impact Area, and not expected to provide suitable habitat for this species.
American bumble bee	*Bombus pensylvanicus*	G3G4; S2	A large bumble bee that nests on the surface of the ground and forages in a variety of large open fields. Vetches (*Vicia*), clovers (*Trifoilium*), goldenrods (*Solidago*), St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), and boneset (*Eupatorium*) are commonly visited by this species.	HP	Not expected to occur. Habitat in the BSA is not expected to provide suitable habitat for this species.
Monarch butterfly	*Danaus plexippus*	FCE	Winter migrant along California coast. Known to roost in eucalyptus trees. Usually encountered in lowland areas. Obligate milkweed host plant (primarily *Asclepias* spp.) during larval stage. Nectar and milkweed resources are often associated with riparian corridors. Overwinter in groves along the coast of California and Baja California, typically close to the coast, populated by a variety of tree species, including blue gum eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*), and Monterey cypress (*Hesperocyparis macrocarpa*).	A	Absent. Eucalyptus groves and the riparian habitat in the BSA could provide suitable habitat for this species. The developed nature of the BSA and surrounding area decreases the potential for occurrence. The survey was conducted during the appropriate season, and this species was not observed; therefore, this species is considered absent. No effect.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
Black abalone	*Haliotis cracherodii*	FE	Marine intertidal and splash zone communities. Mid- to low rocky intertidal areas.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain any intertidal habitat. No effect.
White abalone	*Haliotis sorenseni*	FE	Marine intertidal and 80 splash zone communities. Rocky pinnacles and deep reefs in Southern California, especially those off the Channel Islands. Lives at depths of at least 24 to 61 meters (80 to more than 200 feet).	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain any intertidal habitat. No effect.
San Diego fairy shrimp	*Branchinecta sandiegonensis*	FE	Generally restricted to vernal pools in coastal Southern California and northwestern Baja California. Usually observed from January to March when seasonal rainfall fills vernal pools and initiates cyst (egg) hatching.	A	Absent. No vernal pools or seasonal depressions present in the BSA. No effect.
Riverside fairy shrimp	*Streptocephalus woottoni*	FE	*S. wootoni* is restricted to deep (greater than 12 inches in depth) seasonal vernal pools, vernal pool–like ephemeral ponds, and stock ponds and other human modified depressions.	A	Absent. No vernal pools or seasonal depressions present in the BSA. No effect.
Birds					
Cooper's hawk	*Accipiter cooperii*	WL	Forest and woodland birds. These lanky hawks are a regular sight in parks, quiet neighborhoods, over fields, at backyard feeders, and even along busy streets if there are trees around.	HP	Moderate potential to occur. Tall trees are found throughout the BSA that could be foraging or nesting habitat for this species.
Burrowing owl	*Athene cunicularia*	SCT	Open, dry annual or perennial grasslands, deserts, and scrublands characterized by low-growing vegetation. Subterranean nester; dependent upon burrowing mammals, most notably, the California ground squirrel.	A	Absent. No suitable nesting habitat is present in the BSA. No effect.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
Coastal cactus wren	*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus sandiegensis*	SSC	Year-round resident of Southern California; found in arid parts of westward-draining slopes. Obligate inhabitants of coastal sage scrub, generally below 3,000 feet. Nest almost exclusively in prickly pear and coastal cholla.	A	Absent. No suitable habitat is present within the BSA. The coastal sage scrub habitat in the BSA is not dominated by prickly pear and is surrounded by development. No effect.
Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow	*Aimophila ruficeps canescens*	WL	Found on moderate to steep, dry grass-covered or rocky hillsides, coastal sage scrub, open shrubland, and chaparral; often occur near the edges of the denser scrub and chaparral associations. Preference is shown for tracts of California sagebrush.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain open shrubland or steep rocky slopes. The coastal sage scrub habitat is not considered to be suitable habitat for this species. No effect.
Grasshopper sparrow	*Ammodramus savannarum*	SSC	Breeds in open grasslands, prairies, hayfields, and pastures, typically with some bare ground. Grasshopper sparrows usually avoid breeding in grasslands with extensive shrub cover but are a bit more tolerant of shrubs in migration and during the winter. Nests are domed with grasses, typically well concealed in depressions at the base of grass clumps. Sensitive to edge effects and requires relatively large blocks of contiguous habitat. Valley and foothill (native) grasslands are the preferred habitat, although nonnative grasslands are used by the species as well.	A	Absent. No grasslands or pastures are present in the BSA. No effect.
Tricolored blackbird	*Agelaius tricolor*	ST, SSC	Freshwater marshes. Suitable breeding habitat includes cattails and bulrushes. Common locally throughout Central Valley and in coastal districts from Sonoma County south. In winter, becomes more widespread along central coast and San Francisco Bay Area; found in portions of the Colorado Desert.	HP	Not expected to occur. Cattails were not observed in the riparian habitat within the BSA. The riparian habitat is not expected to provide suitable nesting or foraging habitat for this species.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
			Habitat – Breeds near fresh water, preferably in emergent wetland with tall, dense cattails or tules, but also in thickets of willow, blackberry, wild rose, and tall herbs. Feeds in grassland and cropland habitats. Breeds locally in northeastern California.		
Ferruginous hawk	*Buteo regalis*	WL	Forages in open fields, grasslands and agricultural areas, sagebrush flats, desert scrub, fringes of pinyon-juniper habitats, and other areas of open country in western North America. Not known to breed in California.	A	Absent. No open areas suitable for foraging for this species are present in the BSA. No effect.
White-tailed kite	*Elanus leucurus*	FP	Typically nests in riparian trees such as oaks, willows, and cottonwoods. Suitable breeding habitat includes riparian scrub, woodland, and forest; peninsular juniper woodland and scrub; and oak woodland and forests. Foraging habitat includes areas of agriculture, grasslands, cismontane alkali marshes, playas, vernal pools, freshwater marshes, Riversidean alluvial fan sage scrub, and chaparral.	HP	Not expected to occur. Willow riparian habitat is present within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA; however, it is surrounded by residential development and no nearby suitable foraging habitat. The riparian habitat in the BSA is not expected to provide suitable nesting habitat for the species. No effect.
Southwestern willow flycatcher	*Empidonax traillii extimus*	FE	The southwestern willow flycatcher is present in breeding territories by mid-May. It builds nests and lays eggs in late May and early June and fledges young in early to mid-July. Between August and September, the southwestern willow flycatcher migrates to wintering grounds in Mexico, Central America, and possibly northern South America. This species is an insectivore and forages within and above dense riparian vegetation. The breeding range of the species includes Southern California. The southwestern willow flycatcher breeds in relatively dense riparian tree and shrub communities associated	HP	Not expected to occur. The riparian habitat in the BSA could provide marginal suitable habitat for this species. No impacts on this habitat are expected. OCTA NCCP/HCP covered species. No effect.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
			with rivers, swamps, and other wetlands, including lakes and reservoirs. Habitat patches must be at least 0.25 acre in size and at least 30 feet wide. Following modern changes to riparian communities, this subspecies still nests in native vegetation but also uses thickets dominated by nonnative tamarisk and Russian olive or mixed native nonnative stands.		
California horned lark	*Eremophila alpestris actia*	WL	Open grasslands and fields, agricultural areas, and open montane grasslands. Prefers bare ground such as plowed or fall-planted fields for nesting but may also nest in marshy soil.	A	Absent. No suitable open grasslands or fields present in the BSA. No effect.
Yellow-breasted chat	*Icteria virens*	SSC	Yellow-breasted chats in Southern California are found primarily in dense, relatively wide riparian woodlands and thickets of willows, vine tangles, and dense brush with well-developed understories. Nesting areas are associated with streams, swampy ground, and the borders of small ponds.	HP	Low potential to occur. The riparian habitat in the BSA could provide suitable habitat for this species. No impacts on this habitat are expected.
Coastal California gnatcatcher	*Polioptila californica californica*	FT, SSC	Obligate permanent resident of coastal sage scrub below 835 meters in Southern California. Low coastal sage scrub in arid washes, on mesas, and slopes. Not all areas classified as coastal sage scrub are occupied.	HP	Not expected to occur. The coastal sage scrub habitat in the BSA could provide suitable habitat for foraging and nesting; however, the habitat is small in area, fragmented, and surrounded by development. OCTA NCCP/HCP covered species. No impacts on this habitat are expected. No effect.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
Yellow warbler	*Setophaga petechia*	SSC	Riparian woodland while nesting in the western United States and northwestern Baja California; more widespread in brushy areas and woodlands during migration.	HP	Moderate potential to occur. Willow riparian habitat located within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA contains suitable foraging habitat for this species. No impacts on this habitat are expected.
California least tern	*Sternula antillarum*	FE, SE	Summer resident of Southern California. Feeds primarily in shallow estuaries or lagoons. Nests on barren to sparsely vegetated sites near water, usually on sandy or gravelly substrate.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain estuaries or lagoons. No effect.
Least Bell's vireo	*Vireo bellii pusillus*	FE, SE	Summer resident of Southern California in low riparian habitat in vicinity of water or dry river bottoms below 2,000 feet. Nests placed along margins of bushes or on twigs projecting into pathways, usually willow, baccharis, or mesquite.	HP	Low potential to occur. Willow riparian habitat within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA contains suitable foraging habitat for this species. OCTA NCCP/HCP covered species. No impacts on this habitat are expected. No effect.
Mammals					
East Pacific green sea turtle	*Chelonia mydas*	FT	Eats mostly seagrasses and algae. Found throughout the world.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.
Olive Ridley sea turtle	*Lepidochelys olivacea*	FT/FE breeding	Among the smallest of the world's sea turtles; found primarily in the tropical regions of the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic Oceans. Can be found throughout the world.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.
Leatherback sea turtle	*Dermochelys coriacea*	FE	Highly migratory. Can be found throughout the world but nests mainly in tropical or subtropical beaches.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
North Pacific loggerhead sea turtle	*Caretta caretta*	FE	Loggerheads are the most abundant species of sea turtle that nests in the United States. Juvenile and adult loggerheads live in U.S. coastal waters, but many adults that nest on U.S. beaches migrate from neighboring nations like the Bahamas, Cuba, and Mexico.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.
Blue whale	*Balaenoptera musculus*	FE	Found in all oceans except the Arctic. Along the West Coast of the U.S., eastern North Pacific blue whales are believed to spend winters off Mexico and Central America. They feed during summer off the U.S. West Coast and, to a lesser extent, in the Gulf of Alaska and central North Pacific waters.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.
Fin whale	*Balaenoptera physalus*	FE	Typically found in deep offshore waters of all major oceans, primarily in temperate to polar latitudes.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.
Humpback whale	*Megaptera novaeangliae*	FE	Lives throughout the world's major oceans. The Mexico population, which breeds along the Pacific coast of Mexico and the Revillagigedo Islands, transits the Baja California Peninsula and feeds across a broad range from California to the Aleutian Islands, Alaska.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.
Southern resident killer whale	*Orcinus orca*	FE	Found in all oceans. Although they are most abundant in the colder waters of Antarctica, Norway, and Alaska, they are also found in tropical and subtropical waters. Resident killer whales have been seen from California to Russia. They are not, however, exclusively offshore; they are sometimes seen in coastal nearshore waters.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
North Pacific right whale	*Eubalaena japonica*	FE	Has occurred historically in all the world's oceans, from temperate to subpolar latitudes. Contemporary sightings of right whales have mostly occurred in the central North Pacific and Bering Sea. Sightings have been reported as far south as central Baja California in the eastern North Pacific, as far south as Hawaii in the central North Pacific, and as far north as the sub-Arctic waters of the Bering Sea and Sea of Okhotsk in the summer.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.
Sei whale	*Balaenoptera borealis*	FE	Has a wide distribution, and lives in subtropical, temperate, and subpolar waters around the world. Prefers temperate waters in the mid-latitudes, and can be found in the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.
Sperm whale	*Physeter macrocephalus*	FE	Inhabit all of the world's oceans.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.
Guadalupe fur seal	*Arctocephalus townsendi*	FT/ST	Marine intertidal and splash zone communities and protected deep-water coastal communities. Breeds on Isla de Guadalupe off Mexico and is occasionally found on San Miguel, San Nicolas, and San Clemente Islands. Prefers shallow, nearshore island water, with cool and sheltered rocky areas for haul-outs.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. No effect.
Northwestern San Diego pocket mouse	*Chaetodipus fallax fallax*	G5T3T4; S3S4	Found in sandy herbaceous areas, usually associated with rocks or coarse gravel in coastal scrub, chaparral, grasslands, and sagebrush, from Los Angeles County through southwestern San Bernardino, western Riverside, and San Diego Counties to northern Baja California.	HP	Not expected to occur. Some suitable coastal sage scrub habitat is present in the BSA; however, the habitat is small in area, fragmented, and surrounded by development. No impacts on this habitat are expected.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
Western mastiff bat	*Eumops perotis californicus*	SSC	Open, semi-arid to arid habitats, including conifer and deciduous woodlands, coastal scrub, annual and perennial grasslands, palm oases, chaparral, desert scrub, and urban settings. Suitable habitat consists of extensive open areas with abundant roost locations provided by crevices in rock outcrops and buildings.	HP	Low potential to occur. Foraging and roosting habitat is found in the BSA, including Aliso Creek riparian habitat. No impacts on this habitat are expected.
Yuma myotis	*Myotis yumanensis*	G5; S4	Optimal habitats are open forests and woodlands with sources of water over which to feed. Common and widespread in California. Uncommon in the Mojave and Colorado Desert regions, except for mountains. Range is generally from sea level to 8,000 feet. Roosts in buildings, mines, caves or crevices; occasionally in swallow nests and under bridges.	HP	Low potential to occur. Foraging and roosting habitat is found in the BSA, including Aliso Creek riparian habitat. No impacts on this habitat are expected.
San Diego desert woodrat	*Neotoma lepida intermedia*	SSC	Found in desert scrub and coastal sage scrub habitat, especially in association with cactus patches. Builds stick nests around cacti or on rocky crevices. Occurs along the Pacific slope from San Luis Obispo County to northwest Baja California.	HP	Not expected to occur. Some suitable coastal sage scrub habitat is present in the BSA; however, the habitat is small in area, fragmented, and surrounded by development. No impacts on this habitat are expected.
Southern grasshopper mouse	*Onychomys torridus ramona*	SSC	Believed to inhabit sandy or gravelly valley floor habitats with friable soils in open and semi-open scrub, including coastal sage scrub, mixed chaparral, low sagebrush, riparian scrub, and annual grassland with scattered shrubs, preferring low to moderate shrub cover. More susceptible to small- and large-scale habitat loss and fragmentation than most other rodents	HP	Not expected to occur. Some suitable coastal sage scrub habitat is present in the BSA; however, the habitat is small in area, fragmented, and surrounded by development. No impacts

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
			due to its low fecundity, low population density, and large home range size. Arid portions of southwestern California and northwestern Baja California.		on this habitat are expected.
Pacific pocket mouse	*Perognathus longimembris pacificus*	FE, SSC	Associated with fine grain, sandy substrates in coastal strand, coastal dunes, river alluvium, and coastal sage scrub habitats within approximately 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) of the ocean in Southern California. Historically, it was documented from near El Segundo in Los Angeles County to the vicinity of the Mexican border in San Diego County. Considered still extant at four sites: one site on the Dana Point Headlands in Orange County and three sites on Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton.	A	Absent. The species extirpated from this area. No effect.
Reptiles					
Southern California legless lizard	*Anniella stebbinsi*	SSC	Inhabits coastal dunes, sandy washes, and alluvial fans where there is moist loose soil with sufficient plant cover and/or leaf litter.	A	Absent. No coastal dunes, sandy washes, or alluvial fans are present in the BSA. No effect.
California glossy snake	*Arizona elegans occidentalis*	SSC	Inhabits arid scrub, rocky washes, grasslands, and chaparral. Appears to prefer microhabitats of open areas and areas with soil loose enough for easy burrowing.	A	Absent. No suitable habitat is present in the BSA. No effect.
Orange-throated whiptail	*Aspidoscelis hyperythra*	WL	Prefers washes and other sandy areas with patches of brush and rocks, chaparral, coastal sage scrub, juniper woodland, and oak woodland from sea level to 1,656 meters (3,000 feet) in elevation. Perennial plants required.	HP	Low potential to occur. Some suitable coastal sage scrub habitat is present in the BSA; however, the habitat is small in area, fragmented, and surrounded by development. No impacts on this habitat are expected.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
Coastal whiptail	*Aspidoscelis tigris stejnegeri*	SSC	Woodlands, riparian areas, and sparsely vegetated areas in a wide variety of habitats, including coastal sage scrub and sparse grassland. Occurs in valleys and foothills from Ventura County to Baja California.	HP	Low potential to occur. Some suitable coastal sage scrub and riparian habitat is present in the BSA; however, the habitat is small in area, fragmented, and surrounded by development. No impacts on this habitat are expected.
Western pond turtle	*Actinemys marmorata*	FPT, SSC	A thoroughly aquatic turtle of ponds, marshes, rivers, streams, and irrigation ditches, usually with aquatic vegetation, below 2,000 meters in elevation. Need basking sites and suitable (sandy banks or grassy open fields) upland habitat up to 0.5 kilometer from water for egg-laying. Found in ponds, lakes, rivers, streams, creeks, marshes, and irrigation ditches with abundant vegetation and either rocky or muddy bottoms in woodland, forest, and grassland habitats. In streams, prefers pools to shallower areas. Logs, rocks, cattail mats, and exposed banks are required for basking. May enter brackish water and even seawater.	HP	Low potential to occur. Suitable habitat present in Aliso Creek. No impacts on this habitat are expected. No effect.
Southwestern pond turtle	*Actinemys pallida*	FPT, SSC	A thoroughly aquatic turtle of ponds, marshes, rivers, streams and irrigation ditches, usually with aquatic vegetation, below 2,000 meters in elevation. Need basking sites and suitable (sandy banks or grassy open fields) upland habitat up to 0.5 kilometer from water for egg-laying. Found in ponds, lakes, rivers, streams, creeks, marshes, and irrigation ditches with abundant vegetation and either rocky or muddy bottoms in woodland, forest, and grassland habitats. In streams, prefers pools to shallower areas. Logs, rocks, cattail mats, and exposed banks are required for basking. May enter brackish water and even seawater.	HP	Low Potential to Occur. Suitable habitat present in Aliso Creek. No impacts on this habitat are expected. No effect.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
Red-diamond rattlesnake	*Crotalus ruber*	SSC	Desert scrub, thornscrub, open chaparral, and woodland; occasional in grassland and cultivated areas. Prefers rocky areas and dense vegetation. Morongo Valley in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties to the west, including Orange County and San Diego County and south into Mexico.	HP	Low potential to occur. Some suitable coastal sage scrub habitat is present in the BSA; however, the habitat is small in area, fragmented, and surrounded by development. No impacts on this habitat are expected.
Coast horned lizard	*Phrynosoma blainvillii*	SSC	Primarily in sandy soil in open areas, especially washes and floodplains, in many plant communities. Requires open areas for sunning, bushes for cover, patches of loose soil for burial, and an abundant supply of ants or other insects. Occurs west of the deserts from northern Baja California north to Shasta County below 2,438 meters (8,000 feet) elevation.	HP	Not expected to occur. Some suitable coastal sage scrub habitat is present in the BSA; however, the habitat is small in area, fragmented, and surrounded by development. No impacts on this habitat are expected.
Coast patch-nosed snake	*Salvadora hexalepis virgultea*	SSC	Coastal chaparral, washes, sandy flats and rocky areas. Widely distributed throughout lowlands, up to 2,130 meters (7,000 feet) elevation, of Southern California from coast to the eastern border.	A	Absent. No suitable chaparral, washes, sandy flats, or rocky areas present in the BSA. No effect.
Two-striped gartersnake	*Thamnophis hammondii*	SSC	Highly aquatic. Only in or near permanent sources of water. Streams with rocky beds supporting willows or other riparian vegetation. From Monterey County to northwest Baja California.	HP	Not expected to occur. Some suitable habitat is present in the BSA in Aliso Creek; however, the habitat is small in area, fragmented, and surrounded by development. No impacts on this habitat are expected.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
Amphibians					
Arroyo toad	*Anaxyrus californicus*	FE, SSC	Arroyo toads are found in foothill canyons and inter-mountain valleys where the river is bordered by low hills and the stream gradient is low. Extremely specialized habitat needs, including exposed sandy streamsides with stable terraces for burrowing, scattered vegetation for shelter, and areas of quiet water or pools free of predatory fishes with sandy or gravel bottoms without silt for breeding. Arroyo toads are known to breed, forage, and/or aestivate in aquatic habitats, riparian habitats, coastal sage scrub, oak, and chaparral habitats. Inhabits washes, arroyos, sandy riverbanks, riparian areas with willows, sycamores, oaks, and cottonwoods.	A	Absent. Suitable habitat in Aliso Creek not present. No impacts on this habitat are expected. No effect.
Western spadefoot	*Spea hammondii*	FPT, SSC	Prefers open areas with sandy or gravelly soils in a variety of habitats, including mixed woodlands, grasslands, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, sandy washes, lowlands, river floodplains, alluvial fans, playas, alkali flats, foothills, and mountains. Rainpools lasting a significant amount of time and do not contain bullfrogs, fish, or crayfish are necessary for breeding. Typically found in areas with good native vegetative cover and low levels of disturbance.	A	Absent. No open grassland, vernal pools, or sufficient scrub habitat occurs in the BSA. No effect.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
Fish					
Tidewater goby	*Eucyclogobius newberryi*	FE	Tidewater gobies inhabit lagoons, estuaries, marshes, and freshwater tributaries. These habitats have shallow, still, but not stagnant, water. These habitats are freshwater or brackish water, a varying mix of fresh and saltwater, much of the year. Although they may range upstream a short distance into freshwater, as well as downstream into saltwater with a salinity of 28 parts per thousand, this species is typically found in salinities of less than 12 parts per thousand. When their habitat experiences an influx of saltwater, juvenile and adult tidewater gobies often congregate where freshwater enters the lagoon or estuary.	A	Absent. The BSA does not contain brackish water and is not near an estuary or lagoon. No effect.
Arroyo chub	*Gila orcuttii*	SSC	Perennial streams or intermittent streams with permanent pools and slow-water sections of streams with mud or sand substrates; spawning occurs in pools. Native to Los Angeles, San Gabriel, San Luis Rey, Santa Ana, and Santa Margarita river systems; introduced in Santa Ynez, Santa Maria, Cuyama, and Mojave river systems and smaller coastal streams.	HP	Not expected to occur. Some suitable habitat is present in the BSA in Aliso Creek; however, the habitat is small in area, fragmented, and surrounded by development. No impacts on this habitat are expected.
Green sturgeon DPS	*Acipenser medirostris*	FT	These are the most marine species of sturgeon. Abundance increases northward of Point Conception. Spawns in the Sacramento, Klamath, and Trinity Rivers. Spawns at temperatures between 8 degrees Celsius (°C) and 14°C (46 degrees Fahrenheit [°F] and 57°F). Preferred spawning substrate is large cobble but can range from clean sand to bedrock.	HP	Not expected to occur. BSA does not contain suitable marine habitat. The area of Aliso Creek within the BSA is not expected to provide suitable spawning habitat for this species. No effect.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status[a]	General Habitat Description	Habitat Present/ Absent[b]	Rationale
Steelhead – southern California DPS	*Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus* pop. 10	FE	Anadromous species of salmon that reproduces within Southern California watersheds. Steelhead trout hatch in gravel-bottomed, fast-flowing, well-oxygenated rivers and streams.	HP	Not expected to occur. The area of Aliso Creek within the BSA is not expected to provide suitable habitat for this species, and this species is considered extirpated from this area. No impacts on this species are expected. No effect.
Santa Ana speckled dace	*Rhinichthys Gabrielino*	SSC	Found in the headwaters of the Santa Ana and San Gabriel River drainages. Found in riffles in small streams and shore areas with abundant gravel and rock.	A	Absent. The area of Aliso Creek within the BSA does not contain suitable habitat with abundant gravel and rock. No effect.

Source: Caltrans 2025.

[a.] Federally Listed Endangered (FE); Federally Listed Threatened (FT); Federal Proposed (FP, FPE, FPT); Federal Candidate (FC), Federal Species of Concern (FSC); State-listed Endangered (SE); State-listed Threatened (ST); State Listed as Candidate Threatened (SCT); Fully Protected (FP); State Species of Special Concern (SSC); CDFW Watch List (WL); Global Conservation Status Rank (G); Subnational Conservation Status Rank (S)

[b.] Absent (A) – no habitat present and no further work needed. Habitat Present (HP) – habitat is, or may be, present.

DPS = distinct population segment; OCTA NCCP/HCP = Orange County Transportation Authority Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan

- **Yellow-Breasted Chat** – Yellow-breasted chat is a small songbird with an olive-green colored back with a bright yellow breast and bold face markings. This species breeds in dense shrubby habitats often along rivers. This species is a CDFW Species of Special Concern. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. While the willow riparian habitat and adjacent coastal sage scrub habitat in Aliso Creek (located within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA) may provide suitable foraging and nesting habitat for the yellow-breasted chat, it is 2,700 feet away from the Impact Area.
- **Yellow Warbler** – Yellow warbler is a small songbird that is uniformly yellow with an unmarked face and black eyes. This species nests in riparian woodland in the western United States and northwestern Baja California and is more widespread in brushy areas and woodlands during migration. This species is a CDFW Species of Special Concern. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. While the willow riparian habitat in Aliso Creek (located within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA) may provide suitable foraging and nesting habitat for the yellow warbler, it is 2,700 feet away from the Impact Area.

Amphibians

- **Arroyo Toad** – Arroyo toad is relatively small, ranging from 2 to 3 inches in length, and has olive-green, gray, or light-brown coloration. It is plump bodied and distinctively blunt nosed, with small, oval parotid glands (toxin-secreting defense organs). Habitat requirements include narrow, shallow aquatic and riparian areas with slow-moving water and nearby upland areas. Typical aquatic habitats are bordered by low-elevation hills; scattered vegetation; sandy, fine gravel; and pliable soils. Focused surveys have not been conducted for arroyo toad and are not recommended at this time because the only potential suitable habitat is in Aliso Creek, which is outside of the construction footprint. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. Construction during the I-5 widening project in 2021–2022 along the portion of Aliso Creek within the BSA reported no observations of the species.

Reptiles

- **Orange-Throated Whiptail** – Orange-throated whiptail is a slim-bodied lizard with an unspotted black, dark-brown, or grayish back with six or fewer pale-yellow or whiteish stripes. The throat, and often the chest, is orange. This species occurs in semi-arid brushy areas, typically with loose soil and rocks, including washes, streamsides, rocky hillsides, and coastal chaparral. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. However, the willow riparian habitat and adjacent coastal sage scrub habitat in Aliso Creek (within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA) may provide suitable habitat for the orange-throated whiptail.
- **Coastal Whiptail** – Coastal whiptail is a slim-bodied lizard with a back and sides that are grey, tan, or brown, marked with dark spots, bars, or mottling. This species is found in a variety of ecosystems, primarily hot and dry open areas with sparse foliage in chaparral, woodland, and riparian areas. This species was not

observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. However, the willow riparian habitat and adjacent coastal sage scrub habitat in Aliso Creek (within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA) may provide suitable habitat for the coastal whiptail.

- **Coast Horned Lizard** – Coast horned lizard is a flat-bodied lizard with a wide, oval-shaped body; scattered, enlarged pointed scales on the upper body and tail; and a large crown of horns or spines on the head. This species inhabits open areas within many plant communities. An abundant supply of ants or other insects is required. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. However, the willow riparian habitat and adjacent coastal sage scrub habitat in Aliso Creek (within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA) may provide suitable habitat for the coast horned lizard.
- **Western Pond Turtle and Southwestern Pond Turtle** – Western pond turtle and southwestern pond turtle are medium-sized turtles, reaching between 7 and 9 inches in length. Adult turtles have a yellowish belly, with dark blotches and black spots or lines found on top of their heads. Despite genetic separation, the two pond turtle species appear to have similar life-history traits and suffer from similar threats. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. However, the willow riparian habitat and adjacent coastal sage scrub habitat in Aliso Creek (within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA) may provide suitable habitat for the western pond turtle and southwestern pond turtle.
- **Two-Striped Gartersnake** – Two-striped gartersnake is a medium-sized snake that has a variable appearance. The two basic pattern morphs are striped or spotted. Both patterns have an olive, brown, or dark-gray ground color. The underside is pale yellow or orange. This species is generally found near water sources in oak woodland, willow, coastal sage scrub, scrub oak, sparse pine, chaparral, and brushland habitats. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. However, the willow riparian habitat in Aliso Creek (within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA) may provide suitable habitat for the two-striped gartersnake.

Mammals

- **Western Mastiff Bat** – Western mastiff bat is a CDFW Special Species of Concern and the largest native bat in the United States. This species roosts in crevices in cliff faces, high buildings, trees, and tunnels. Suitable habitat consists of extensive open areas with abundant roost locations provided by crevices in rock outcrops and buildings. Focused surveys have not been conducted for the western mastiff bat and are not recommended at this time because the only potential suitable habitat is in Aliso Creek, which is outside of the construction footprint. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey.
- **Yuma Myotis** – Yuma myotis is widespread throughout California and roosts in buildings, mines, caves, crevices, swallow nests, and under bridges. Yuma myotis consume primarily aquatic emergent insects associated with those

foraging habitats, are dependent upon water sources, and are frequently found in urban environments. Focused surveys have not been conducted for Yuma myotis and are not recommended at this time because the only potential suitable habitat is within Aliso Creek, the I-5 bridge over Aliso Creek, or the I-5 bridge over El Toro Road, which is outside of the construction footprint. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey, although a maternity colony of Yuma myotis is known to roost within the I-5 bridge over Aliso Creek.

- **Northwestern San Diego Pocket Mouse** – Northwestern San Diego pocket mouse is a moderately sized pocket mouse that is a dark brown on top and white underneath. It is a common resident of sandy herbaceous areas in coastal scrub, chaparral, sagebrush, desert wash, desert scrub, pinyon-juniper, and annual grassland habitats. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. However, the coastal sage scrub habitat adjacent to Aliso Creek (within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA) may provide suitable habitat for the northwestern San Diego pocket mouse.
- **San Diego Desert Woodrat** – San Diego desert woodrat is a pale to dark-gray woodrat with a tail that is more than half of the body length and white hind feet. This species can be found in desert scrub and coastal sage scrub habitat, especially associated with cactus patches. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. However, the coastal sage scrub habitat adjacent to Aliso Creek (within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA) may provide suitable habitat for the San Diego desert woodrat.
- **Southern Grasshopper Mouse** – Southern grasshopper mouse is a small mouse with an upper body that is grayish or pinkish-cinnamon colored. The underside and terminal tip of the tail are white. It is common in arid desert habitats but also occurs in coastal scrub, mixed chaparral, sagebrush, and bitterbrush habitats. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. However, the coastal sage scrub habitat adjacent to Aliso Creek (within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA) may provide suitable habitat for the southern grasshopper mouse.

Fish

- **Arroyo Chub** – Arroyo chub is a small chunky fish with large eyes, a short round snout, and small sub-terminal mouth. Its body is silver or gray to olive green on top with a white underside; it has a dull gray lateral band. This species is native to the streams and rivers of the Los Angeles Plain in Southern California. It has been extirpated from much of its native range. Arroyo chub are most common in slow-flowing or backwater areas with sand or a mud substrate. This species was not observed or detected during the January 11, 2024, general biological survey. However, Aliso Creek (within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA) may provide suitable habitat for the arroyo chub.

2.4.4.3 Environmental Consequences

Temporary Impacts

Build Alternatives

Build Alternative 1

The Project would not result in direct or indirect temporary impacts on special-status animal species. Potential habitat for these species is associated primarily with Aliso Creek and adjacent habitats, which are within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA but 2,700 feet outside the Project's construction footprint.

The Project would not result in direct impacts on nesting birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and California Fish and Game Code, provided that measures are implemented to avoid impacts during the nesting season (February 1– September 30).

Although no temporary impacts on special-status animal species are anticipated, Project Feature **PF-BIO-2** would be implemented to avoid impacts on nesting birds. Project Feature **PF-BIO-3** would require a biological monitor to be present during construction for the protection of special-status animal species.

PF-BIO-2 **Nesting Bird Avoidance:** Caltrans anticipates the potential for nesting birds to occur February 1 to September 30 (nesting bird season). In order to avoid impacts on nesting birds, vegetation removal and/or ground disturbance will occur outside of the nesting bird season to avoid construction delays. If this is not feasible, a qualified biologist will survey the work area no more than 3 days prior to construction activities. If an active nest (i.e., with eggs or young) is found, a no-work buffer will be established by the qualified biologist (100 feet for passerines and up to 500 feet for special-status bird species and/or raptors). No-work limits will be determined by the biologist and depend on the sensitivity of the species, location of the nest, and existing site conditions (e.g., existing high levels of human activity and/or noise in the vicinity of the nest).

PF-BIO-3 **Biological Monitoring:** A biologist will monitor all vegetation clearing and any other construction activities (at the discretion of a qualified biologist) for the duration of the Project in areas adjacent to environmentally sensitive areas (riparian habitat and coastal sage scrub associated with Aliso Creek) to flush any wildlife species present prior to construction; avoid direct mortality of wildlife and ensure compliance with and proper implementation of vegetation removal, best management practices, and Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs); and ensure that all biological resource-related avoidance and minimization measures are properly adhered to.

Design Variation: Build Alternative 1a

The design variation considered under Build Alternative 1a is substantively similar to Build Alternative 1 and would not result in additional impacts on special-status animal species. Direct and indirect temporary impacts on special-status animal species under Build Alternative 1a would be the same as described for Build Alternative 1.

Build Alternative 3

Build Alternative 3 would not result in any ground disturbance or other activities that would affect special-status animal species. As such, there would be no Project-related temporary impacts on special-status animal species.

No-Build Alternative

Under the No-Build Alternative, I-5 would remain in its current condition and no improvements would be implemented. Therefore, there would be no Project-related temporary impacts on special-status animal species.

Permanent Impacts

Build Alternatives

Build Alternative 1

The Project would not result in direct or indirect permanent impacts on special-status animal species. Potential habitat for these species is associated primarily with Aliso Creek and adjacent habitats, which are within the 500-foot buffer of the BSA but 2,700 feet outside the Project's construction footprint.

The Project would not result in direct permanent impacts on nesting birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and California Fish and Game Code, provided that measures are implemented to avoid impacts during the nesting season (February 1–September 30).

Design Variation: Build Alternative 1a

The design variation considered under Build Alternative 1a is substantively similar to Build Alternative 1 and would not result in additional impacts on special-status animal species. Direct and indirect permanent impacts on special-status animal species under Build Alternative 1a would be the same as described for Build Alternative 1.

Build Alternative 3

Build Alternative 3 would not result in any ground disturbance or other activities that would affect special-status animal species. As such, there would be no Project-related permanent impacts on special-status animal species.

No-Build Alternative

Under the No-Build Alternative, I-5 would remain in its current condition and no improvements would be implemented. Therefore, there would be no Project-related permanent impacts on special-status animal species.

2.4.4.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Although impacts on special-status animal species are not anticipated, the following avoidance and minimization measures would be implemented to ensure their protection:

BIO-2 **Delineation of Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs):** As described in Section 2.4.1, *Natural Communities*, this measure would protect potential habitat for animal species from construction activities.

BIO-3 **On-site Training:** As described in Section 2.4.1, *Natural Communities*, this measure would include training regarding special-status animal species.

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