

April 19, 2023 Revised June 19, 2023 Revised August 15, 2023

Ms. Leslie Frazier City of Santa Clarita 23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 120 Santa Clarita, CA 91355

## RE: PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES IDENTIFICATION REPORT FOR THE VIA PRINCESSA PARK PROJECT, SANTA CLARITA, CALIFORNIA

Dear Ms. Frazier:

In support of the proposed Via Princessa Park Project (project), Michael Baker International staff conducted a fossil locality search at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (NHMLAC), literature and geologic map review, and a paleontological resources sensitivity analysis. These efforts identified the paleontological sensitivity of the project area and determined whether the project could result in significant impacts to paleontological resources in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Methods, results, and recommendations are summarized below; figures are provided in **Attachment 1**.

## **PROJECT SITE**

The project site is located in the City of Santa Clarita in Los Angeles County, California, between the Santa Clara River to the north, Via Princessa and Friendly Valley Golf Course to the south, Whites Canyon Road to the west, and Sierra Highway to the east (**Figure 1**). The project site is within the southeast quarter of Section 20 and the northeast quarter of Section 29 of Township 4 North and Range 15 West, San Bernardino Baseline and Meridian of the Mint Canyon, California 7.5-minute US Geological Survey (USGS) topographic quadrangle (**Figure 2**).

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The project site is primarily undeveloped, with existing improvements constructed on the southerly portion of the property, including the Via Princessa Metrolink Station, an existing restroom and office building, and an existing parking lot (approximately 400 spaces). The purpose of the project is to construct and operate Via Princessa Park, which, in addition to recreational improvements, would include a regional stormwater infiltration facility on an approximately 33-acre area of vacant City-owned land. The City's Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan Update (August 2008) identified the proposed Via Princessa Park as a possible future park to provide needed recreational facilities to the community. The project would include athletic fields with sports field lighting, pickleball courts, playground equipment, and other recreational facilities,

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such as walking paths, shade structures, picnic areas, public art, and education and monumentation signage. Relatively deep excavationtions

Additionally, the project would provide parking, park access, and other amenities and improvements, including alterations to the existing Via Princessa Metrolink Station parking lot, construction of a pedestrian and vehicle (restricted access) railroad undercrossing (including removal of the existing at-grade pedestrian crossing), relocation of an existing storm drain line, construction of a new restroom building with associated utilities, improvements to the existing restroom/office building located in the parking area, landscaping and irrigation improvements, and restoration of the existing Honby drainage channel.

Additionally, the Project has been identified by the Santa Clarita Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency as an optimal location for off-stream recharge, and the proposed infiltration basin would help the Agency meet its goals of sustainable basin management in accordance with its 2020 Urban Water Management Plan. As a result, the project also includes civil and geotechnical design features, including a subterranean regional stormwater infiltration facility, buried bank protection, a storm drain culvert extension, removal of an agricultural water well, and soil processing requirements and design considerations. Additionally, a fourth lane may be added to Weyerhauser Way, and modifications may be made to Via Princessa to accommodate a double left-turn lane into and/or out of Weyerhauser Way. **Figure 3** depicts the preliminary project site plan. Project construction is anticipated to begin by the summer of 2025, with construction completion planned for late 2028.

The Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration contains details of the project characteristics. They consist of new park facilities, a regional stormwater infiltration facility, the Honby Channel temporary channel diversion and construction crossing, improvements to Honby Channel, buried bank protection along the south bank of Santa Clara River and Honby Channel, Southern California Regional Rail Authority/Metrolink grade-separated undercrossing to replace the at-grade pedestrian crossing, Weyerhauser Way Park/site access improvements, and parking lot improvements. Relatively deep excavations of 20 to 25 feet deep are anticipated for the railroad right-of-way undercrossing, creek bank stabilization, and structural infiltration facilities, while relatively shallow grading is anticipated to prepare the ground surface for the sports fields and ancillary improvements.

## **GEOLOGIC SETTING**

California is divided into 11 geomorphic provinces, each defined by unique geologic and geomorphic characteristics. The project site is in the central portion of the Transverse Ranges geomorphic province, marked by east–west trending mountain ranges and valleys in contrast to the northwest-trending ranges of coastal California (CGS 2002). The Transverse Ranges province crosses several counties and is bound by the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Coast Ranges and Sierra Nevada geomorphic provinces to the north, the Mojave Desert geomorphic province to the

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east, and the Peninsular Ranges and Colorado Desert geomorphic provinces to the south (CGS 2002).

The geology of Santa Clarita has been mapped by Campbell et al. (2016) at a scale of 1:100,000 and by Dibblee and Ehrenspeck (1996) at a scale of 1:24,000. Geologic units underlying the project area have been mapped as Holocene- and late Pleistocene-age Quaternary young alluvium, undivided (Qya of Campbell et al. 2016) and Holocene-age alluvial gravel, sand, and clay deposits (Qa of Dibblee and Ehrenspeck 1996). Deposits from the Holocene epoch (less than 11,700 years ago) can contain remains of animals and plants; however, only those from the middle to early Holocene (older than about 5,000 radiocarbon years) are considered scientifically important or significant (SVP 2010). Holocene-age deposits may overlie older alluvium of Pleistocene age at unknown but potentially shallow depths. Pleistocene-age alluvial deposits are also potentially present in the project site and have yielded scientifically important fossils elsewhere in the region, including horses, squirrels, birds, sea turtles, and invertebrates at various depths below current ground surface (**Tables 1** and **2**). Less than 0.5 miles west of the project site, Miocene- to Plioceneage geologic units have also been mapped (Mint Canyon and Towsley Formations of Campbell et al. 2016; Mint Canyon and Castaic Formations of Dibblee and Ehrenspeck 1996) and also potentially underlie the project site.

The most recent geotechnical report for the project area included the drilling, logging, and sampling of 18 small-diameter borings (B-1 to B-18) to depths ranging from 21 ½ feet to 101 ½ feet and four cone penetrating testings (CPTs) to depths of 11.4 to 35.4 feet below ground surface (Harrell et al. 2023). The results of the boring found fill deposits up to a depth of 3 to 7 feet in B-1, B-6, B-12, B-14, B-16, B-17, and B-18. These borings are within the existing parking lot or just north of the railroad. Alluvial deposits were encountered beneath the fill or from the surface to the full depth explored of up to approximately 101 ½ feet. The Geotech report does not provide geological ages for the encountered alluvium, but based on the existing knowledge of the geology in the region and as explained in the paragraph above, Middle to Early Holocene and Pleistocene age alluvial deposits are highly likely in the project area.

Soils of the project site are mapped as Hanford sandy loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes (HcA), Cortina sandy loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes (CyA), Yolo loam, 2 to 9 percent slopes (YoC), Riverwash (Rg), and sandy alluvial lands (Sa) (NRCS 2023). The Hanford series "consists of very deep, well-drained soils that formed in moderately coarse-textured alluvium dominantly from granite" and is located on stream bottoms, alluvial fans, and floodplains (USDA 1999). The Cortina series "consists of very deep, somewhat excessively drained soils" formed in gravelly alluvium from mixed rock sources and is typically located on alluvial fans and floodplains (USDA 1997). The Yolo series "consists of very deep, well-drained soils that formed in alluvium from mixed rocks" and is typically located on alluvial fans and floodplains (USDA 1997). The Yolo series "consists of very deep, well-drained soils that formed in alluvium from mixed rocks" and is typically located on alluvial fans and floodplains (USDA 2018). Riverwash and sandy alluvial lands, both found along the Santa Clara River floodplain, are considered land types because of their frequent disturbance and lack of plant life (URS 2009).

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## PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES IDENTIFICATION METHODS

The records search results, literature review, and paleontological sensitivity analysis are presented below.

#### **RECORDS SEARCHES AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

The NHMLAC completed a paleontology collection records search for locality and specimen data on February 6, 2023. The results of that search are included in **Attachment 2**. The records search identified seven known fossil localities in the NHMLAC's collection in the vicinity of the project site (**Table 1**). Pleistocene-age alluvial deposits have yielded scientifically important fossils, including sea turtles, dugongs, packrats, squirrels, deer mice, kangaroo rats, birds, and invertebrates, within 2 miles of the project site.

Locality Number	Distance to Project Site	Formation	Таха	Depth
LACM VP	~ 2 miles NW	Saugus Formation:	Packrat ( <i>Neotoma</i> ), squirrel	Unknown
7988-7989		paleosol bounded by	(Sciuridae), deer mice	
		conglomerate beds	( <i>Peromyscus</i> ), kangaroo rat	
		(late Pliocene to early	(Heteromyidae), finch	
		Pleistocene)	(Fringillidae)	
LACM VP	~ 9 miles W	Saugus Formation	Horse ( <i>Plesippus</i> )	Unknown
6063		(late Pliocene to early		
		Pleistocene)		
LACM VP	~ 1.2 miles SE	Marine beds:	Dugong (Dugongidae)	Unknown
CIT 441;		Towsley Formation		
LACM IP		(late Miocene to early		
2558		Pliocene) or Castaic		
		Formation (Miocene)		
LACM VP	~ 1.8 miles E	Castaic Formation:	Sea turtle (Psephophorus);	Unknown
7656;		pebbly sandstone	invertebrates (unspecified)	
LACM IP		(Miocene)		
291				

#### Table 1: NHMLAC Paleontological Records Search Results

Formation ages from National Geologic Map Database (2023)

Additionally, Michael Baker International conducted a supplemental investigation within 3 miles of the project site using the following online sources:

- University of California Museum of Paleontology Locality Search (UCMP 2023)
- San Diego Natural History Museum Collection Database (SDNHM 2023)
- The Paleobiology Database (PBDB 2023)

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The supplemental investigation resulted in the identification of nine additional fossil localities. Six additional localities from the Mint Canyon Formation, a rock unit named for a geographic feature less than 3 miles northeast of the project site, have been recorded in the UCMP database, though their exact distance to the project site is unknown (**Table 2**).

Locality	Distance to			
Number	Project Site	Formation	Таха	Depth
111550	~ 1 mile SE	Juncal Formation	Invertebrates - Ostreidae	Unknown
(PBDB)		(Eocene)		
111551	~ 1 mile SE	Juncal Formation	Invertebrates - Ostreidae	Unknown
(PBDB)		(Eocene)		
111552	~ 1 mile SE	Juncal Formation	Invertebrates - Gastropoda;	Unknown
(PBDB)		(Eocene)	Bivalvia	
111553	~ 1 mile SE	Juncal Formation	Invertebrates –	Unknown
(PBDB)		(Eocene)	Turritellidae; Volutidae	
111554	~ 1 mile SE	Juncal Formation	Invertebrates - Gastropoda;	Unknown
(PBDB)		(Eocene)	Bivalvia	
111555	~ 1 mile SE	Juncal Formation	Invertebrates - Cassidae	Unknown
(PBDB)		(Eocene)		
45499	~ 2 miles E	Towlsey Formation	<i>Dusisiren jordani;</i> Baleen	Unknown
(PBDB)		(Miocene)	whale (Nannocetus eremus)	
52212	~ 2 miles E	Fernando	Invertebrates - Pontolis	Unknown
(PBDB)		Formation	magnus; Terebratula;	
		(Miocene)	Lucinidae; Pectinidae	
218944	~2.5 miles E	Pico Formation	Invertebrates – (Buccinidae.	Unknown
(PBDB)		(Pilocene)	Nassariidae, Elachisinidae,	
			Pectinidae)	
-3555	Unknown	Mint Canyon	Horses (Equidae,	Unknown
(UCMP)		Formation	Hipparionini, <i>Hipparion</i> ,	
		(Miocene)	Merychippus	
			intermontanus),	
			pronghorns (Merycodus),	
			turtles (Cryptodira,	
			Geochelone), rabbits	
			(Hypolagus apachensis)	
-3564	Unknown	Mint Canyon	Horses (Hipparion and	Unknown
(UCMP)		Formation	Merychippus	
		(Miocene)	intermontanus)	

## Table 2: Supplemental Paleontological Records Search

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Locality Number	Distance to Project Site	Formation	Таха	Depth
-3566 (UCMP)	Unknown	Mint Canyon Formation (Miocene)	Horse (Merychippus intermontanus)	Unknown
-3571 (UCMP)	Unknown	Mint Canyon Formation (Miocene)	Gomphotherium	Unknown
-3973 (UCMP)	Unknown	Mint Canyon Formation (Miocene)	Camels (Camelidae)	Unknown
P40 (UCMP)	Unknown	Mint Canyon Formation (Miocene)	Multiple plants, such as burberry ( <i>Mahonia</i> ), willow ( <i>Salix</i> ), flannel bush ( <i>Fremontia lobata</i> ), grapes ( <i>Vitis</i> ), oak ( <i>Quercus</i> ), acacia ( <i>Acacia</i> ), sumac ( <i>Rhus</i> ), mountain mahogany ( <i>Cercocarpus</i> ), persimmon ( <i>Diospyros</i> ), paintbrush ( <i>Castelea</i> ), buckthorn ( <i>Rhamnus</i> )	Unknown

Reviewing the published scientific literature also yielded six reported occurrences of invertebrate fossils—including bivalves, gastropods, and crabs—from Eocene-age Juncal Formation deposits in the area east of Newhall, approximately 4 miles south of the project site (Squires 2008). One locality yielding sea cow (dugong) fossils was reported from Pliocene-age Pico Formation deposits east of Newhall (Frederico and McLain 2021). Fifteen occurrences were reported from Pico Formation deposits south of Newhall, over 5 miles southeast of the project site, yielding brachiopod, bivalve, gastropod, scaphopod, crab, sea urchin, pinecone, and ray fossils (Squires 2012).

## PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS

The NHMLAC paleontological records search and fossil locality searches in the online databases (PBDB, SDNHM, and UCMP) did not identify any paleontological resources within the project site. However, several localities have been found within 3 miles of the project site in similar rock formations to those underlying the project (Quaternary young alluvium, undivided and Holocene alluvial deposits). Per mitigation impact guidelines set forth by the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (SVP 2010), due to the fossil sensitivity of the rock formations present within the project site, the project has a high potential to disturb paleontological resources within undisturbed sedimentary deposits and bedrock.

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## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Full-time paleontological monitoring is recommended during ground disturbance in undisturbed geologic contexts that have the potential to contain significant paleontological resources. Ground disturbance refers to activities that would impact subsurface geologic deposits, such as grading, excavation, and boring. Activities taking place in current topsoil or within previously disturbed fill sediments, e.g., clearing and grubbing, or at the current topsoil surface, e.g., building renovations, do not require paleontological monitoring. The following mitigation measures (MM) are recommended to be implemented such that in the event of any discovery of unknown paleontological resources during earthwork, impacts would be **less than significant**.

- **MM PALEO-1:** The contractor must retain a Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (SVP) qualified paleontologist to provide or supervise a paleontological sensitivity training (i.e. Workers Environmental Awareness Program or WEAP training) to all personnel planned to be involved with earth-moving activities, prior to the beginning of ground-disturbing activities. The training session will focus on how to identify paleontological localities, such as fossils, that may be encountered and the procedures to follow if identified.
- **MM PALEO-2:** Prior to grading or excavation in sedimentary deposits and/or sedimentary rock material other than topsoil, specifically the Middle to Early Holocene and Pleistocene alluvial deposits, the contractor shall retain an SVP-qualified paleontologist to monitor or oversee monitoring of these activities. The paleontological monitor should be on site for the railroad right-of-way undercrossing, creek bank stabilization, and structural infiltration facilities as these area are scheduled for excavation of between 20 to 25 feet. Spot-checking of the areas of more shallow excavations will be sufficient. If fossils are discovered during grading at any depth, the on-site construction supervisor shall be notified and redirect work away from the location of the discovery. The recommendations of the paleontologist shall be implemented with respect to the evaluation and recovery of fossils, after which the on-site construction supervisor shall be notified and shall direct work to continue in the location of the fossil discovery.
- **MM PALEO-3:** If the fossils are determined to be significant, then the SVP-qualified paleontologist shall prepare and implement a data recovery plan. The plan shall include the following measures at a minimum:
  - The paleontologist shall ensure that all significant fossils collected are cleaned, identified, cataloged, and permanently curated with an

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appropriate institution with a research interest in the materials (which may include the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County);

- The paleontologist shall ensure that specialty studies are completed, as appropriate, for any significant fossil collected; and
- The paleontologist shall ensure that the curation of fossils is completed in consultation with the City. The curation institution's acceptance letter shall be submitted to the City.
- MM PALEO-4: If any paleontological resources are encountered during construction or the course of any ground-disturbance activities, all such activities shall halt immediately. At this time, the City will consult with a qualified paleontologist to assess the significance of the find. The assessment will follow SVP standards as delineated in the Standard Procedures for the Assessment and Mitigation of Adverse Impacts to Paleontological Resources (2010). If any find is determined to be significant, appropriate avoidance measures recommended by the consultant and approved by the City must be followed unless avoidance is determined to be infeasible by the City. If there is a federal nexus for the Project, the involved federal agency (e.g., the US Army Corps of Engineers) shall also be consulted. If avoidance is infeasible, other appropriate measures (e.g., data recovery, excavation) shall be instituted. The recommendations of the qualified paleontologist shall be implemented with respect to the evaluation and recovery of fossils, after which the on-site construction supervisor shall be notified and shall direct work to continue in the location of the fossil discovery. Any fossils recovered during mitigation shall be cleaned, identified, cataloged, and permanently curated with an accredited and permanent scientific institution with a research interest in the materials.

If no fossils have been recovered after 50 percent of the excavation has been completed, full-time monitoring may be modified to weekly spot-check monitoring at the discretion of the qualified paleontologist. The qualified paleontologist may recommend to the client to reduce paleontological monitoring based on observations of specific site conditions during initial monitoring (e.g. if the geologic setting precludes the occurrence of fossils). The recommendation to reduce or discontinue paleontological monitoring in the project area shall be based on the professional opinion of the qualified paleontologist regarding the potential for fossils to be present after a reasonable extent of the geology and stratigraphy has been evaluated.

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A qualified professional paleontologist is a professional with a graduate degree in paleontology, geology, or related field, with demonstrated experience in the vertebrate, invertebrate, or botanical paleontology of California, as well as at least one year of full-time professional experience or equivalent specialized training in paleontological research (i.e., the identification of fossil deposits, application of paleontological field and laboratory procedures and techniques, and curation of fossil specimens), and at least four months of supervised field and analytic experience in general North American paleontology as defined by the SVP.

## PREPARER QUALIFICATIONS

This memorandum was prepared by Michael Baker International Senior Paleontologist Peter Kloess, PhD. Senior Cultural Resources Manager Margo Nayyar reviewed the memo for quality control.

**Peter A. Kloess, PhD, Principal Investigator—Paleontology** is a principal investigator and paleontologist with over 20 years of experience in paleontology, with 7 years in paleontology mitigation. His experience includes private and public consultation, field monitoring, excavation, and laboratory research on projects across the western United States, predominantly in California. He has consulting experience with a range of projects, including construction, transportation, utility, transmission, monitoring, and surveys, as well as expertise recovering a diversity of fossils from project sites, such as marine invertebrates, microfossils, plants, small mammals, and birds, large marine and terrestrial mammals, and dinosaurs. He also has extensive experience in paleontological museum collections and lab settings. He has worked on and co-led scientific excavations of large mammals and dinosaurs in California, Utah, New Mexico, and Montana. Mr. Kloess has served as a lab preparator and assistant curator for paleontology museums in California and Montana, where his duties included manual preparation of specimens, casting, jacketing, public outreach, cataloging, and curation. He meets the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology's standards for paleontological Principal Investigator.

**Margo Nayyar, MA,** is a senior architectural historian with 13 years of cultural management experience in California, Nevada, Arizona, Texas, Idaho, and Mississippi. Her experience includes built environment surveys, evaluation of historic-era resources using guidelines outlined in the California and National Registers, and preparation of cultural resources technical studies pursuant to CEQA and NHPA Section 106, including identification studies, finding of effect documents, memorandum of agreements, programmatic agreements, and Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey mitigation documentation. She prepares cultural resources sections for CEQA environmental documents, including infill checklists, initial studies, environmental impact reports, and NEPA environmental documents specializes in municipal preservation planning, historic preservation ordinance updates, Native

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American consultation, and provision of Certified Local Government training to interested local governments. She develops Survey 123 and Esri Collector applications for large-scale historic resources surveys, and authors National Register nomination packets. Margo meets the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards for history and architectural history.

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Should you have any questions regarding this report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

- mh Pt

Peter Kloess, PhD Senior Paleontologist

Attachments: Attachment 1 – Figures Attachment 2 – Records Search Results

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# Attachment 1 Figures

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Source: Esri, ArcGIS Online, National Geographic World Map: Santa Clarita, California

Figure 1



Source: Esri, ArcGIS Online, Mint Canyon USGS 7.5-Minute topographic quadrangle maps: Santa Clarita, California



## via princessa park project santa clarita, ca Concept Plan

Source: City of Santa Clarita, California

Michael Baker

INTERNATIONAL

Figure 3

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# Attachment 2

# **Records Search Results**

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Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County 900 Exposition Boulevard Los Angeles, CA 90007

tel 213.763.DINO www.nhm.org

Research & Collections

e-mail: paleorecords@nhm.org

February 6, 2023

H I S T O R Y M U S E U M LOS ANGELES COUNTY

NATURAL

Michael Baker International Attn: Max van Rensselaer

re: Paleontological resources for the Via Princessa Park Project

Dear Max:

I have conducted a thorough search of our paleontology collection records for the locality and specimen data for proposed development at the Via Princessa Park Project area as outlined on the portion of the Mint Canyon USGS topographic quadrangle map that you sent to me via e-mail on January 17, 2023. We do not have any fossil localities that lie directly within the proposed project area, but we do have fossil localities nearby from the same sedimentary deposits that occur in the proposed project area, either at the surface or at depth.

The following table shows the closest known localities in the collection of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (NHMLA).

Locality Number	Location	Formation	Таха	Depth
			Packrat ( <i>Neotoma</i> ), squirrel	Unknown (collected
	Five Knolls	Saugus Formation	( <i>Sciuridae</i> ), deer mice	during
	development,	(paleosol bounded	(Peromyscus), kangaroo rat	grading for
LACM VP	Golden Valley Rd.,	by conglomerate	(Heteromyidae), finch	housing
7988-7989	Santa Clarita	beds)	(Fringillidae)	development)
	Housing			
	development off			unknown
	Franklin Pkwy west			(collected
LACM VP	of Commerce	o = /		during
6063	Center Dr.	Saugus Formation	Horse ( <i>Plesippus</i> )	grading work)
	Hillside to the			
	southwest of the	Marine beds		
LACM VP CIT	Via Princessa and	(Towsley Formation		
441; LACM IP	Highway 14	or Castaic		
2558	crossing	Formation)	Dugong (Dugongidae)	Unknown
LACM VP	Humphreys, just			
7656*; LACM	south of Fair Oaks	Castaic Formation	Sea turtle (Psephophorus);	
IP 291	Park	(pebbly sandstone)	invertebrates (unspecified)	Unknown

VP, Vertebrate Paleontology; IP, Invertebrate Paleontology; bgs, below ground surface

\* Robert J. Stanton. 1966. Megafauna of the Castaic Formation. J. Paleo. 40(1):21-40

This records search covers only the records of the NHMLA. It is not intended as a paleontological assessment of the project area for the purposes of CEQA or NEPA. Potentially fossil-bearing units are present in the project area, either at the surface or in the subsurface. As such, NHMLA recommends that a full paleontological assessment of the project area be conducted by a paleontologist meeting Bureau of Land Management or Society of Vertebrate Paleontology standards.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Bell

Alyssa Bell, Ph.D. Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

enclosure: invoice