

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

D. CULTURAL RESOURCES

A cultural resources survey for the proposed project was prepared in June 2002 by W.H. Bonner Associates. The report was based on a records search of the South Central Coastal Information Center (SCCIC) and a field survey of the project site conducted on June 12, 2002 by W.H. Bonner Associates. This Draft EIR section incorporates the findings of this effort. The cultural resources survey is contained in its entirety in Appendix F of this Draft EIR.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

PREHISTORIC OVERVIEW

The prehistory of the Southern California area encompasses four main horizons – Early Man Horizon, Milling Stone Horizon, Intermediate Horizon and Late Prehistoric Horizon. Early Man Horizon spans the period from the end of the Pleistocene to approximately 6,000 B.C. This horizon is characterized by assemblages that include large projectile points and scrapers. Limited available data suggests that prehistoric populations focused on hunting and gathering, moving about the region in small nomadic groups.

The Milling Stone Horizon is characterized by the appearance of handstones and millingstones and tentatively dates to between 6,000 B.C. and 1,000 B.C. Assemblages in the early Milling Stone period reflect an emphasis on plant foods and foraging subsistence systems. Artifact assemblages include choppers, and scraper planes, but generally lack projectile points. The appearance of large projectile points in the latter portion of the Milling Stone Horizon suggests a more diverse economy. The distribution of Millingstone sites suggests that aboriginal groups followed a semi-sedentary pattern, where a base camp was occupied for a portion of the year, but a small population group seasonally occupied subsidiary camps in order to exploit resources not generally available near the base camp. Sedentism apparently increased in areas where more resources were available for longer periods of time. More arid inland regions would have provided a seasonally and areally dispersed resource base, restricting sedentary occupation.

The Intermediate Horizon represents a transitional period likely dated between 1,000 B.C. and A.D. 750. Little is known about the people of this period, especially those of inland Southern California. Site assemblages retain many attributes of the Milling Stone Horizon, but also contain large stemmed or notched projectile points and portable mortar and pestles. The mortars and pestles suggest that the aboriginal populations may have harvested, processed, and consumed acorns. Neither the settlement-subsistence system or the cultural evolution of this period is well understood due to a general lack of data. Sedentism is thought to have increased with the exploitation of storable food resources (acorns).

The Late Prehistoric Horizon extended from A.D. 750 to Spanish contact in A.D. 1769. This horizon reflects an increased sophistication and diversity in technology characterized by the presence of small projectile points which imply the use of the bow and arrow. In addition, assemblages include steatite bowls, asphaltum, grave goods, and elaborate shell ornaments. Use of bedrock milling stations was widespread during this horizon. Increased hunting efficiency and widespread exploitation of acorns provided reliable and storable food resources. These innovations apparently promoted greater sedentism.

OVERVIEW OF ETHNOHISTORY AND HISTORY

At the time of European contact in 1769, the Los Angeles Basin was occupied by the Gabrielino, Native Americans so called by the Spanish. The Gabrielino are, in many ways, one of the least known groups of California native inhabitants. In addition to much of the Los Angeles basin, the Gabrielino occupied the offshore islands of Santa Catalina and San Clemente. Gabrielino populations are difficult to reconstruct, but as many as 50 to 100 villages were simultaneously occupied. Like the prehistoric culture before them, the Gabrielino were a hunter/gatherer group who lived in small sedentary or semi-sedentary groups of 50 to 100 persons, known as rancherias. These rancherias were occupied by at least some of the people all of the time. The location of encampment was determined by water availability.

The first intrusion of Europeans into the San Fernando Valley occurred in 1769 when the Portol expedition passed through on the way to Monterey Bay. The San Fernando mission was not established until 1797 and once established, the mission was deeded most of the San Fernando Valley. Two private ranchos (El Escorpion and Encino) later were granted on the west side and south side, respectively.

Following closure of the California missions in 1834, the San Fernando Valley was leased by the Mexican government to Andrs Pico in 1845. The next year, Governor Pio Pico sold the same property to Eulogio de Celis in order to raise money to defend California against the American invasion. Eulogio de Celis recognized the Andrs Picos lease and sold him half interest in the San Fernando Valley rancho in 1854.

In 1874, Senators George K. Porter and Charles Maclay purchased the northern half of Ex-Mission San Fernando. The valley remained largely agricultural throughout the remaining decades of the 19th Century. During this period, a number of small communities were established. One of these was the settlement of Chatsworth, founded in 1887, during a population boom in Southern California that followed the arrival of the railroad to Los Angeles. All that remains today of early Chatsworth is the Hill-Palmer House, which was built by James David Hill.

The San Fernando Valley, except for the City of San Fernando, was annexed to the City of Los Angeles in 1912 in order to obtain water rights provided by William Mulholland's water project. This permitted establishment of new communities throughout the San Fernando Valley. Chatsworth, located in the far northwest corner of the San Fernando Valley, remained largely rural until the last half of the 20th Century when residential communities began filling up over the entire valley.

A review of historic maps, including United States Geological Survey (USGS) maps, show that the project site is located within the former Ex-Mission San Fernando Land grant. In 1903, a few scattered rural roads, and no more than one or two structures, were located within a half-mile radius of the property. Nothing is shown on the project site (Santa Susana, 1903 USGS 15 minute sheet) at that time. By 1932, the area remained largely rural with a few scattered rural roads and three structures located on the west side of DeSoto Avenue, with nothing mapped at the project site (Zelzah, 1932 USGS 7.5 minute quadrangle). By 1957, DeSoto and Lurline Avenues were paved, but Rinaldi Street was not yet constructed and parcels north of Tulsa Street remained undeveloped.

SITE CONDITIONS AND NATURAL SETTING

The project site is located within the Oat Mountain USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle with a corresponding elevation of approximately 1,080 feet at Nashville Avenue and 1,145 feet at the highest point along the northern boundary. The site consists of a natural upper terrace that is currently improved with a former single-family estate residence constructed in the early 1970s (now under the ownership of the applicant), an east-west trending slope through the middle of the property and a lower relatively flat area that extends the length of the site. With the exception of estate related improvements in the upper terrace, the site is essentially undeveloped.

The site is underlain by surface deposit of Recent Alluvium composed of loams, clays, silts, and sands and Late Cretaceous marine sedimentary rocks over several thousand feet thick, locally termed the Chatsworth Formation. The Chatsworth Formation is composed of thickly bedded sandstones, alternating with thinly bedded sandstones, mudstones, shales, and conglomerates, that often contains marine invertebrate fossils (marine shells) that are not considered rare in occurrence. This deposit is exposed in the Santa Susana Mountains north and west of the secondary school parcel, but lies several hundred feet below the Recent Alluvium on the project site. The Chatsworth formation is not considered to have a high potential for yielding paleontological resources.¹ Other formations in the area include Paleocene Martinez Formation, Eocene Santa Susana and Las Lajas Formations, Miocene Topanga and Monterey Formations, Pliocene Pico Formation and Pleistocene Saugus Formation. None of these formations are exposed within the project area. The reader is referred to Section V.E, Geology and Soils, of this Draft EIR, for further discussion of geologic conditions within the site.

EXISTING RESOURCES

Archaeological and Historic Records Search

The archaeological records and archival search performed found three archaeological sites (LAn-209, LAn-649, and LAn-1743) and three historic properties (19-150431, 19-150432, and 19-150433) have been recorded within a one-half mile of the school's property. All three archaeological sites consist of rock shelters using overhanging granite boulder outcrops and are located approximately 1,500 feet to the northwest, north of the SR-118 Freeway. There are no rock outcrops on the project site itself. Sixteen previous cultural resource investigations have been performed within one-half mile of the property, but none assessed the project site itself.

A review of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the California State Historic Resources Inventory (HRI), the California Points of Historical Interest (CPHI), and the California Historical Landmarks (CHL) did not find any historic properties on or within a one-half mile radius of the Sierra Canyon Secondary School property. The three historic properties catalogued at the SCCIC are based on a 1903 topographic map and were located approximately 1,000 feet west of the present day site. None of these structures remain standing, having been replaced by tract housing in the 1960s and 1970s. As such, none of these 1903 structures are listed on any historic register.

Additionally, the records search did not find any listing for historic properties or features on the project site. Existing structures on the site are less than 50 years old and are not unique with

¹ Exhibit M.1-1, Paleontological Potential By Rock Unit/Geologic Formation, Draft CEQA Thresholds Guide, page M-9, City of Los Angeles, Department of City Planning, May 14, 1998.

respect to their architectural style or design. No known local, state or federal historic designations have been placed on the property and existing structures are not considered to be historical resources under Section 15064.5(a) of the CEQA Guidelines.

Results of Site Survey

The pedestrian survey of the project site was conducted on June 12, 2002. As previously described, the upper terrace is occupied by the former residence and extensive improvements. The eastern half of the estate is landscaped with lawns and ornamental trees and there is no remaining native vegetation. An area of less than one acre at the west end of the estate is undeveloped and unlandscaped. The rest of the residential property is fully improved and/or paved or built over. Vacant property occupies the remainder of the site. Soil was generally sandy with scattered small rocks and pebbles and no significant native vegetation was observed during the survey. A very light scatter of modern trash was also observed throughout the property. Ground visibility at the time of the survey was excellent. Subsequent to the survey of the project site in 2002, initial grading of Rinaldi Street extension substantially altered the adjacent area, however, these activities do not in any way alter the findings of the 2002 survey as surface conditions were less disturbed in the project area at that time.

A few sandstone boulders were noted in the 2002 survey off-site in the lot east of 20846 Rinaldi Street that contained small fragments of fossil shell. As previously stated, this is fairly common to the project area. With the exception of these few fossil shell fragments, no paleontological resources were noted during the survey. Based on the absence of unique archaeological or paleontological resources on the property, the site is considered to have a low sensitivity rating with respect to cultural resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

THRESHOLD OF SIGNIFICANCE

In accordance with the Section 15064.5(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines, an EIR shall determine whether a project will have a significant effect on unique archaeological resources. Unique archaeological resources are defined as follows:

An archaeological artifact, object or site about which it can be clearly demonstrated that, without merely adding to the current body of knowledge, there is a high probability that it meets any of the following criteria:

- Contains information needed to answer important scientific research questions and that there is a demonstrable public interest in that information.
- Has a special and particular quality such as being the oldest of its type or the best available of its type.
- Is directly associated with a scientifically recognized important prehistoric or historic event or person

If an archaeological resource is not defined as unique, then the effects of a project on that resource shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment. Disturbance,

disruption, damage, degradation or removal of a unique archaeological resource, or its setting, as defined by the CEQA Guidelines is therefore considered to be a significant impact.²

Additionally, the City of Los Angeles Draft CEQA Thresholds Guide also considers an archaeological resource to be defined as follows:

- It is at least 100-years old and possesses substantial stratigraphic integrity; or
- Important research questions that historical research has shown can be answered only with archaeological methods.

Disturbance, disruption, damage, degradation or removal of such an archaeological resource, or its setting, is also considered to be a significant impact.

In addition, in accordance with the City of Los Angeles' Draft CEQA Thresholds Guide, a significant impact to paleontological resources would occur on a case-by-case basis considering:

- Whether, or to the degree to which, the project might result in the permanent loss of, or loss of access to, a paleontological resource; and
- Whether the paleontological resource is of regional or statewide significance.

PROJECT IMPACTS

Development of the proposed secondary school campus will require grading to accommodate the campus on the sloping site and provide for adequately engineered parking and circulation areas, structures and improvements. Total grading for the school is estimated to be approximately 22,000 cubic yards, of which 10,600 cubic yards would be exported for disposal off-site (see Section V.E, Geology and Soils, of this Draft EIR, for further discussion of grading requirements for the site). As previously described in the Existing Site Conditions discussion in this section, most of upper terrace has been fully developed with an estate residence and associated improvements. As also previously described in the Existing Conditions discussion, a field survey, records search and related investigation determined that the site has a low sensitivity rating with regard to archaeological and paleontological resources. No historic resources are present on the property and structures are less than 50 years of age with no unique architectural qualities. The site is therefore fairly characterized as a partially developed property with no known or recorded cultural resources present.

Site excavation and grading would substantially alter the undeveloped portions of the site. Grading would be necessary to create level building pads and accommodate internal site circulation. Significant subsurface excavation would not be required and would only penetrate the upper levels of the Recent Alluvium that overlays the Chatsworth Formation under the site. Given that 1) no resources are known to be present within the site boundaries, 2) site grading would not extend to depths where any significant paleontological resources could be found, if such were present in the Chatsworth Formation, and 3) the property has an overall low resource sensitivity, no unique archaeological, paleontological or historic resources should be encountered by the project. As such, no disruption, damage, degradation or removal of a unique archaeological and paleontological is anticipated and no significant impacts would occur

² Public Resources Code, Division 13, Section 21083.2(g), as amended through January 1, 2004.

with the proposed project. Archaeological or paleontological resource monitoring during construction would neither be needed nor required. However, the presence of such resources in the surrounding area provides for the possibility, however remote, that unrecorded resources could be encountered during grading activities. Although such a possibility is considered very remote, mitigation is nonetheless included in this Draft EIR (see Mitigation Measures discussion below) in the event resources are otherwise accidentally encountered.

MITIGATION MEASURES

- IV.D-1 In the event any cultural resources or remains are encountered during grading, excavation and site preparation, the project shall be halted and a qualified archaeologist and/or paleontologist with expertise in the area shall be immediately consulted in order to assess the nature, extent and significance of any cultural materials that are encountered. The services of an archaeologist shall be secured by contacting the Center for Public Archaeology – Cal State University Northridge, or a member of the Society of Professional Archaeologists (SOPA), or a SOPA qualified archaeologist to assess the resources and evaluate the impact.
- IV.D-2 Upon review of the resources by the archaeologist and/or paleontologist, and consistent with CEQA Guidelines §15064.5(f), construction work on project elements that do not pose a threat to the encountered resources may resume. Project elements that threaten the resources may resume when the impact to the resource is mitigated to the satisfaction of the project archaeologist and/or paleontologist.
- IV.D-3 Unless otherwise so specified by the archaeologist and/or paleontologist, items shall be removed in a professional manner for further laboratory examination. Any significant fossils shall be either displayed or properly stored at the school for educational purposes, or donated to a public non-profit institution with a research interest in the materials, such as the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. The institution selected must be capable of curating the specimens, field notes, geologic maps and stratigraphic sections as well as allowing for retrieval of specific specimens by researchers in the future.
- IV.D-4 In the event of discovery of Native American remains or of grave goods, §7050.5 of the Health and Safety Code, and §5094.98 and §5097.99 of the Public Resources code apply. No further disturbance shall occur until the County of Los Angeles Coroner has made the necessary findings as to origin and disposition.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The proposed secondary school project, in and of itself, would not significantly impact known archaeological or paleontological resources and the site is considered to have a low cultural resource sensitivity. Any impacts to cultural resources that could occur from the identified related projects would occur irrespective of the proposed project. The project would be a neutral contributor to any significant cumulative conditions, as changes to overall site conditions would not rise to a level of significance with the proposed project, and any cumulative impacts that could occur from other projects would be unchanged whether the proposed school project is built. Projects proximate to the site (Related Project Nos. 3 and 11) would not be expected to have any greater likelihood of encountering unrecorded resources than the proposed project. Other projects in the Chatsworth-Porter Ranch communities could result in site-specific impacts to those sites, some of which could be significant depending on the resources and conditions

present at those locations. The most significant of the related projects, the Porter Ranch Specific Plan (Related Project No. 2), is located in area of higher archaeological and paleontological sensitivity than the proposed project and has been subject to its own extensive environmental analysis and mitigation. As with the proposed project, it is always possible that unrecorded resources could be encountered by other related projects and appropriate mitigation required in accordance with the CEQA Guidelines. Similarly, it is possible that one of the related projects could be located within the Monterey Formation, and thus have a higher potential for encountering paleontological resources than the proposed project. Any such impacts would be individual in nature and subject to their own discrete environmental review and CEQA Guidelines required mitigation programs. The contribution of the project to any cumulative cultural resource impacts would not be considered cumulatively considerable and thus, is less than significant.

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

The project site has a low cultural resource sensitivity and development of the secondary school would not have a significant impact to known cultural resources. Although no significant impacts are anticipated, implementation of mitigation measures as appropriate would further ensure that significant cumulative or project-specific unmitigated impacts to archaeological and/or paleontological resources would not occur.