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## IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

### C. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

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#### ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

##### Regulatory Setting

Protected sensitive species are usually classified by both state and federal resource management agencies as threatened or endangered, under provisions of the state and federal Endangered Species Acts. Vulnerable or “at-risk” species which have been proposed or are being considered for listing as threatened or endangered or “species of special concern” are categorized administratively by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) uses various terminology and classifications to describe vulnerable species.

##### *Federal Protection and Classifications*

The federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) defines an endangered species as “any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.... .” Threatened species are defined as “any species which is likely to become an endangered species in the foreseeable future throughout all or significant portions of its range.... .”

##### *State of California Protection and Classifications*

California’s Endangered Species Act (CESA) defines an endangered species as “...a native species or subspecies of a bird, mammal, fish, amphibian, reptile, or plant which is in serious danger of becoming extinct throughout all, or a significant portion, of its range due to one or more causes, including loss of habitat, change in habitat, overexploitation, predation, competition, or disease.” The state defines a threatened species as “... a native species or subspecies of a bird, mammal, fish, amphibian, reptile, or plant that, although not presently threatened with extinction, is likely to become an endangered species in the foreseeable future in the absence of the special protection and management efforts required by this chapter. Any animal determined by the commission as rare on or before January 1, 1985 is a threatened species.” Candidate species are defined as “...a native species or subspecies of a bird, mammal, fish, amphibian, reptile, or plant that the commission has formally noticed as being under review by the department for addition to either the list of endangered species or the list of threatened species, or a species for which the commission has published a notice of proposed regulation to add the species to either list.” Candidate species may be afforded temporary protection as though they were already listed as threatened or endangered at the discretion of the Fish and Game Commission. Unlike FESA, CESA does not include listing provisions for invertebrate species.

### ***City of Los Angeles Landscape Ordinance***

The City of Los Angeles Landscape Ordinance (170,978) was developed with a purpose to mitigate the physical environmental effects of development projects. Specifically the purpose of the Landscape Ordinance is (1) bring greater order and certainty to the development process, (2) to assist in responding to State-level mandates (i.e. water conservation, energy conservation, enhancement of water quality, and amelioration of air quality), (3) to increase the amount and quality of appropriate landscaping and (4) to establish a minimum level of regulation that protects the public and at the same time allows for design flexibility.<sup>1</sup> The Landscape Ordinance applies to any project that involves an increase of 2,000 square feet or more of impervious surface area. Specific requirements of the Landscape Ordinance that are applicable to the proposed project are summarized as follows:

- **Parking Lots**: To reduce light and glare one 24” box tree shall be planted for every 4 parking spaces.
- **Shading of Structures**: To conserve energy deciduous trees shall be planted within 25 feet of the east and west façade of each structure.
- **Air Quality**: To improve air quality 1 tree shall be planted for every 500 square feet of landscaped area.
- **Water Conservation**: To conserve water and to comply with AB325 the proposed landscape plan shall be designed in substantial conformity with Guidelines BB –Irrigation Specifications (Potable Water) of the Landscape Ordinance.

In addition to these requirements, the City of Los Angeles Planning Department imposes the following additional requirements for the removal of non oak trees:

- Prior to the issuance of a grading permit, a plot plan prepared by a reputable tree expert, indicating the location, size, type, and condition of all existing trees shall be submitted for approval by the Department of City Planning and the Street Tree Division of the Bureau of Street Services. All trees in the public right-of-way shall be provided per current Street Tree Division standards.
- The plan shall contain measures recommended by the tree expert for the preservation of as many trees as possible. Mitigation measures such as replacement by a minimum of 24-inch box trees in the parkway and on site, on a 1:1 basis, shall be required for the unavoidable loss of

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<sup>1</sup> *City of Los Angeles Landscape Ordinance, Ord. No. 170,978, effective May 12, 1996.*

desirable trees on site, and to the satisfaction of the Street Tree Division of the Bureau of Street Services and the Advisory Agency.

### ***City of Los Angeles Oak Tree Ordinance***

Oak trees are a valued and protected tree species within the City of Los Angeles. The City's Oak Tree Ordinance (153,478) provides for the protection of all oak trees that measure eight inches in diameter or more as measured from four and one-half feet above the ground level at the base of the tree. The Ordinance defines oak trees as Valley Oak (*Quercus lobata*) and California Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), or any other tree of the oak genus indigenous to California, other than Scrub Oaks (*Quercus dumosa*). In summary, the Oak Tree Ordinance provides the following mitigation for the removal or loss of any oak tree on site:

- A minimum of two oak trees (a minimum of 48 inch box in size) shall be planted for each one that is removed. The canopy of the oak trees planted shall be in proportion to the canopies of the oak trees removed per Ordinance No. 153,478 and to the satisfaction of the Street Tree Division of the Bureau of Street Services and the Advisory Agency. All oak tree removals must be approved by the Board of Public Works on sites more than one acre in size. Contact: Street Tree Division at: 213-485-5675.

### **Physical Setting**

#### ***Wildlife Habitat and Migration***

The East Campus site is currently developed with 60,000 square feet of school and church related uses. No natural habitat remains on the site as it is entirely developed and landscaped as a school campus. Due to the amount of development and constant human presence on the East Campus, any animal species observed on the site can be classified as habitat generalists. Such species include ground squirrels, birds, reptiles, and other rodent species which are capable of thriving in human environments. Wildlife species with specialized niches or that are overly sensitive to human disturbance are not likely to occur on the project site. No known federal or state protected species are known to inhabit the East Campus site.

The West Campus project site occupies approximately 5.5 acres and is currently developed with three residential structures with accessory buildings. All of the structures are generally situated along the Shoshone Avenue and Rinaldi Street frontages. The remainder of the West Campus is vacant and characterized by invasive and native ground cover that is routinely disked or weeded for fire suppression measures. As described in greater detail below, approximately 207 trees were recorded throughout the property. A majority of the tree species are ornamental in nature and have been planted

over time in association with the residential uses on the property. This is evident through the number and distribution of citrus and palm trees recorded on the property. The site has been substantially disturbed and ornamentally landscaped through many years of residential and urban use. As recorded by field ecologists from Teracor Resource Management, no natural vegetation communities are present on site, and open vacant areas on the site can best be described as ruderal. No notable native vegetation is present on the site other than the coast live oak trees. Because the West Campus is completely surrounded by residential development and is not contiguous to any substantial open space or parkland areas, the site is not conducive to species migration. Any use of the site to support migratory patterns would be limited to bird species which can access the site on a transitory basis. Since the project site is located within the foothills of the Santa Susana Mountains, a number bird species are known to frequent the project area and adjacent residential neighborhoods. While specific bird surveys were not conducted on the West Campus property, no occurrences of bird nests or roosts were observed by field biologists during repeated site visits to the subject property during tree surveys. Due to the level of disturbance on the property and the quality of vegetation and habitat the site affords, the likelihood of any federal or state protected species to occur on the site is considered low.

### ***Tree Inventory***

**Non Oak Trees.** For purposes of this environmental impact report a tree inventory was conducted for the West Campus property by James Dean, A.S.L.A., Landscape Architect. James Dean staff surveyed the project site and reviewed previous tree inventory reports prepared by Tucker's Tree Works, dated October 26, 1998 and Teracor Resources, dated September 24, 1999. These reports are presented in their entirety in Appendix B to this Draft EIR. As depicted in the aerial photograph in Figure III-3 in Section III, Project Description, the distribution of trees on the site is highly unbalanced, with a majority of the trees concentrated around the residences and the along the higher elevations of the site. Virtually no trees are present along the southwestern portion of the site along Rinaldi Street, west of the residential structures. James Dean recorded a total of 207 non-oak tree species on the project site. Of the trees surveyed, 94 of these tree species are considered undesirable tree species. Undesirable species were identified in terms of species type or plant quality. Therefore, for purposes of complying with the Landscape Ordinance, a total of 118 non-oak trees were recorded on the project site which warrant transplanting or replacement under the Landscape Ordinance.

**Oak Trees.** In September 1999, Teracor Resources prepared an Oak Tree Report for the West Campus project site. The West Campus site was surveyed for oak trees in accordance with the City of Los Angeles Oak Tree Ordinance (i.e., all oak species (other than scrub oak) with a trunk diameter of eight or more inches). A total of 10 oak trees were recorded and mapped on the project site. The individual oak tree locations are shown in Figure IV.C-1, Oak Tree Location Map, on page 102. An assessment rating was assigned to each oak tree. Eight of the ten trees were noted as having been excessively cut to the soil profile by brush removal crews during the 1998 weed clearance season. The eight removals

resulted in substantially reduced scores in aesthetic appearance, health and overall condition. As these trees have begun to crown sprout and were of ordinance size prior to being cut, they were considered protected under the ordinance and mitigation is recommended. Of the two remaining trees on site, one was recorded as being in excellent health, while the other was recorded as having poor health due largely to apparent excessive watering and periodic trimming.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

### **Thresholds of Significance**

In accordance with the City of Los Angeles Draft L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide, a project would normally have a significant impact upon biological resources if the project results in:

- The loss of individuals, or the reduction of existing habitat, of a state or federal listed endangered, threatened, rare, protected, candidate, or sensitive species or a Species of Special Concern;
- The loss of individuals or the reduction of existing habitat of a locally designated species or a reduction in a locally designated natural habitat or plant community;
- Interference with wildlife movement/migration corridors that may diminish the chances for long-term survival of a sensitive species;
- The alteration of an existing wetland habitat; or
- Interference with habitat such that normal species behaviors are disturbed (e.g., from the introduction of noise, light) to a degree that may diminish the chances for long-term survival of a sensitive species.

### **Project Impacts**

The Hillcrest Christian School and Church Expansion Plan proposes to demolish and remove the existing single-family residences from the West Campus site and develop a new expansion campus to accommodate the secondary school grades. Development of the West Campus will require site clearing and grading activities throughout the entire property. All of the existing trees and vegetation will be cleared and removed during the construction process. Upon completion, the West Campus site will be developed with a 75,000 square foot, three story education building with classrooms, administration offices, a gymnasium, and other school related ancillary uses. The site will include a surface parking lot to accommodate approximately 124 cars with driveway access provided via Rinaldi Street. An

**Figure IV.C-1 Oak Tree Location Map**

outdoor grass athletic field will be developed north of the education building adjacent to Shoshone Avenue.

### ***Impacts to Wildlife/Protected Species***

As discussed previously, no natural plant assemblages or vegetation communities are present on the West Campus site. Existing vegetation on the site consists of exotic and native ground cover and ornamental tree species. The site is located in a designated Mountain Fire District and is routinely cleared and disked for fire suppression measures. As such no natural vegetation communities or plant assemblages have established on the project site. Because of these conditions, no sensitive, candidate or special status species nor supporting habitat for such species are known to occur within the project site or surrounding locale. Therefore, grading of the entire project site would not impact any federal or state protected species identified as a candidate, sensitive or otherwise special status species.

### ***Impacts to Trees***

Development of the proposed expansion plan will ultimately require the removal and/or relocation of all 207 non oak trees and ten oak trees that have been recorded on the project site. Based on consultation with James Dean Landscape Architect, AS.L.A., only 118 of the 207 non-oak trees on site are considered desirable tree species that warrant replacement. Only a few of the desirable trees warrant transplanting efforts. The removal and relocation of tree species will be commensurate with the grading and site clearing activities associated with each phase of development. A summary of the project impacts to tree resources is presented in Table IV.C-1 on page 104. A detailed description of the Initial Phase and Final Phase impacts to trees is provided below.

**Initial Phase.** The Initial Phase will include the development of the proposed parking lot and the grading and preparation of a portion of the proposed athletic field area for the placement of the temporary modular classrooms at the north end of the site. It is anticipated that the Initial Phase will result in the removal of approximately 69 desirable non-oak trees and all ten of the oak trees. Most of the trees on the northwestern slope of the property will remain in tact during the Initial Phase, as no grading is required for that area. As depicted in Figure IV.C-2 on page 105, the Initial Phase Landscaping Plan will include tree planting/replacement for the affected areas of the site and in areas where site construction is considered final.

The Initial Phase tree planting program will include planting or transplanting a total of approximately 112 trees on site. Approximately 50 trees are proposed to be located within and around the parking lot area. Pursuant to the requirements of the Landscape Ordinance (1 tree for every four parking spaces), only 31 trees are required to be planted within the parking lot. The 50 trees proposed in the parking lot are will thus meet the requirements of the Landscaping Ordinance. Trees proposed for the parking lot

**Table IV.C-1  
Tree Removal/Replacement Summary**

	Existing Trees	Trees Removed	Trees Required	Trees Proposed
<b>Non Oak Trees</b>	207	207	--	
<b>Desirable Non-Oak Trees</b>	118	118	118	140
<b>Oak Trees</b>	10	10	22	22
<i>Source(s): Christopher A. Joseph Associates, 2001. Tree Inventory/Impact Summary, James Dean Landscape Architects, ASLA, October 2000 Oak Tree Report, TeraCor Resource Management, September 1999.</i>				

area include *Quercus Virginiana*, or Southern Live Oak throughout with *Pistacia chinense*, or Chinese Pistache at end planters. Southern Live Oaks are a evergreen to semi-evergreen species that grows to an approximate height of 60 to 80 feet. The Chinese Pistache is a deciduous species that typically grows to a height of 25 to 35 feet. As such, these species are suitable to provide ample shading and heat attenuation in the parking lot.

The Initial Phase will include 21 trees on the east side of the proposed temporary classroom modular trailers, adjacent to Shoshone Avenue. This area will also include a hedge row of shrubs and ground cover to soften and shield off site views of the campus and reduce soil erosion.

The Initial Phase Landscape Plan proposes the planting of 22 street trees within the public right-of-way sidewalk areas along Rinaldi Street and Shoshone Avenue. Currently, no street trees are located along either streets in the vicinity of the project site. As depicted on the Landscape Plan, a total of 15 trees are proposed along Shoshone Avenue and 7 trees are proposed along Rinaldi Street. In addition to street trees proposed around the West Campus, 19 trees are proposed to be replanted within the public right-of-way along the east side of Rinaldi Street, adjacent to the East Campus. The street trees currently located along the East Campus property on Rinaldi Street are decaying and rotting from disease. All of the street trees are proposed to be *Koelrueteria bipinata*, or Bougainvillea Goldenraintree. The Bougainvillea Goldenraintree is a deciduous species that typically grows to a height of 20 to 35 feet. This species is considered a suitable street tree species.

**Final Phase.** The Final Phase Landscaping Plan is depicted in Figure IV.C-3 on page 107. As shown in Figure IV.C-3, the Final Phase Landscaping Plan will include the development of the education building and the final preparation of the athletic field. Eight trees are proposed to be planted or replanted along the frontages of Rinaldi Street and Shoshone Avenue, adjacent to the newly constructed

Figure IV.C-2 Initial Phase Landscape Plan

education building. Final preparation of the proposed athletic field area will entail additional grading and tree removal to allow for the construction of the retaining wall(s) proposed along the northwestern slopes. A total of 44 trees are proposed along the upper portion of the slope to the west of the athletic field area. 22 of the trees in this location will be replacement oaks as required by the oak tree ordinance. Altogether a total of 162 trees will be planted on and adjacent to the project site as part of the West Campus expansion plan.

***Consistency with the Landscape Ordinance.*** As discussed above, upon completion of the Final Landscaping Plan, a total of 162 trees (140 trees and 22 replacement oak trees) will be replanted as part of the proposed project. The Landscaping Ordinance requires replanting all desirable trees that are destroyed or removed by a project on a 1 to 1 basis. With the removal of 118 desirable trees on the project site, the project applicant will be required to relocate or replant at least 118 trees. Not including the 22 oak trees that are required as mitigation, and the 19 replacement street trees proposed for the east side of Shoshone Street, the project will replace more than the 118 trees required to be replaced on a 1:1 ratio. Therefore, the proposed project will be consistent with the Landscape Ordinance.

In addition to meeting the tree replacement requirements, the proposed Landscaping Plan will meet all of the general goals of the Landscape Ordinance. Such goals include conserving energy and reducing heat attenuation in the parking lot. The proposed irrigation system will also be designed with drip irrigation, where appropriate. The ground cover proposed for the athletic field will be hydroseeded turf of a highly durable and drought tolerant grass species. Trees will be planted in and around the parking lot area and along the eastern facade of the proposed education building. These trees will provide sufficient shading to reduce heat attenuation. As a result of special constraints imposed by the topography and proposed retaining walls, no trees are proposed along the west façade of the education building. However, as a result of the topographical features, a majority of the western facing façade will be below surface grade elevations. This will essentially have the same effect on conservation measures as a substantial portion of the building walls will not be exposed to direct sunlight. As such the proposed project will be designed in substantial conformance to the Landscape Plan.

***Consistency with the Oak Tree Ordinance.*** As indicated previously, a total of 10 ordinance sized Coast Live Oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) were identified on the site as being protected under the Oak Tree Ordinance. Development of the proposed project will require removal or transplanting of all trees on the project site, including the remaining two oak trees. Of the two remaining oak trees on-site, one was recorded as being in poor condition. Removal and replacement for that tree is recommended at a ratio of 3:1. The other remaining oak tree was recorded in relatively good health. However, whether it can be successfully transplanted on site remains uncertain. Transplant efforts for this tree will be decided under the discretion of the project Landscape Architect and the City of Los Angeles Street Tree

**Figure IV.C-3 Final Phase Landscape Plan**

Division staff. For purposes of this analysis, however, it is presumed to be replaced through mitigation at a ratio of 3:1. In accordance with the Oak Tree Ordinance, a minimum of two oak trees (a minimum of 48 inch box in size) shall be planted for each one that is removed. Pursuant to this requirement, a total of 22 Coast Live Oak trees (*Quercus agrifolia*) are proposed as part of the West Campus final Landscape Plan. The loss of eight of oak trees recorded on site are recommended to be replaced through mitigation at a ratio of 2:1. The removal of the two remaining oak trees on site are recommended to be mitigated at a ratio of 3:1. Replacement oak trees are proposed to be located in the northern portion of the West Campus, west of the proposed athletic field. As shown on the Landscape plan, the oak trees will be placed on the site during the Initial Phase to allow them to acclimate to the site. These trees will not be planted until the retaining walls are constructed and the final site preparation is complete. Compliance with the Oak Tree Ordinance will be listed as a mitigation measure to ensure impacts upon oak tree resources are properly mitigated. Only after implementation of the mitigation measures, impacts upon oak tree resources be reduced to less than significant levels.

## **CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

Development of the proposed project in conjunction with the related projects listed in Section III would result in further “infilling” of development within the Granada Hills Community Planning Area of the City of Los Angeles. All of the remaining related projects are proposed in highly urbanized areas that are characterized by flatter, previously disturbed topography, that are unlikely to support significant native vegetation and wildlife. As such, none of the related projects form a continuous habitat migration corridor. Impacts upon biological resources would therefore be generally isolated to each respective property and would be determined on a case-by-case basis. Where applicable, each of the related projects would be required to conform with the City’s standard conditions for biological resources, such as replacing any trees to be removed and the preparation of a landscape plan. Therefore, no significant cumulative biological resource impacts are anticipated from the proposed project and the related projects.

## **MITIGATION MEASURES**

### **Tree Removal (Non-Oaks)**

1. Prior to the issuance of a grading permit, a plot plan prepared by a reputable tree expert, indicating the location, size, type, and condition of all existing trees shall be submitted for approval by the Department of City Planning and the Street Tree Division of the Bureau of Street Services. All trees in the public right-of-way shall be provided per current Street Tree Division standards.

2. The plan shall contain measures recommended by the tree expert for the preservation of as many trees as possible. Mitigation measures such as replacement by a minimum of 24-inch box trees in the parkway and on site, on a 1:1 basis, shall be required for the unavoidable loss of desirable trees on site, and to the satisfaction of the Street Tree Division of the Bureau of Street Services and the Advisory Agency. Note: Removal of all trees in the public right-of-way shall require approval of the Board of Public Works. Contact Street Tree Division at: 213-485-5675.

**Oak Trees/Tree Removal (Locally Designated Species)**

3. Prior to the issuance of a grading permit, the applicant shall submit a tree report and landscape plan prepared by a Municipal Code-designated oak tree expert as designated by LAMC Ordinance #153,478 for approval by the City Planning Department and the Street Tree Division of the Bureau of Street Services.
4. A minimum of two oak trees (a minimum of 48 inch box in size) shall be planted for each one that is removed. The canopy of the oak trees planted shall be in proportion to the canopies of the oak trees removed per Ordinance No. 153,478 and to the satisfaction of the Street Tree Division of the Bureau of Street Services and the Advisory Agency. All oak tree removals must be approved by the Board of Public Works on sites more than one acre in size. Contact: Street Tree Division at: 213-485-5675.

**Bonding (Oak Tree Survival)**

5. The developer shall post a bond or other assurances acceptable to the Bureau of Engineering in consultation with the Street Tree Division and Advisory Agency(or other decision-maker) guaranteeing the survival of trees required to be maintained, replaced or relocated in such a fashion as to assure the existence of continuously living trees for a minimum of three years from the date that the bond is posted or from the date such trees are replaced or relocated, whichever is longer. Any change of ownership will require that the new owner post a new oak tree bond to the satisfaction of the Bureau of Engineering. Subsequently, the original owner's oak tree bond may be exonerated.

The City Engineer shall use the provisions of Section 17.08 as its procedural guide in satisfaction of said bond requirements and processing. Prior to exoneration of the bond, the owner of the property shall provide evidence satisfactory to the City Engineer and Street Tree Division that the oak trees were properly replaced, the date of the replacement and the survival of the replacement trees for a period of three years.

## **LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION**

With implementation of the mitigation measures listed above, impacts upon biological resources would be reduced to less than significant levels.