



San Joaquin County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation and Open Space Plan

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Burrowing owl *Speotyto cunicularia*

Burrowing owls inhabit open grasslands and shrublands in the Central Valley, coastal regions, and deserts of California. They live and breed in burrows created by badgers and ground squirrels. They occur in a patchy distribution throughout San Joaquin County, but recent studies have shown a decline of over 50 percent in the number of breeding pairs in the Central Valley. There are 88 records in San Joaquin County, of which 46 define occupied habitat. Burrowing owls occur in open ground and forage on small rodents and larger insects. They require burrows dug by fossorial mammals; burrowing owls take over when the burrows are abandoned by the original resident.

5.2.4.15 Burrowing Owls

The presence of ground squirrels and squirrel burrows are attractive to burrowing owls. Burrowing owls may therefore be discouraged from entering or occupying construction areas by discouraging the presence of ground squirrels. To accomplish this, the Project Proponent should prevent ground squirrels from occupying the project site early in the planning process by employing one of the following practices:

- The Project Proponent may plant new vegetation or retain existing vegetation entirely covering the site at a height of approximately 36" above the ground. Vegetation should be retained until construction begins. Vegetation will discourage both ground squirrel and owl use of the site.
- Alternatively, if burrowing owls are not known or suspected on a project site and the area is an unlikely occupation site for red legged frogs, San Joaquin kit fox, or tiger salamanders:

The Project Proponent may disc or plow the entire project site to destroy any ground squirrel burrows. At the same time burrows are destroyed, ground squirrels should be removed through one of the following approved methods to prevent reoccupation of the project site. Detailed descriptions of these methods are included in Appendix A, Protecting Endangered Species, Interim Measures for Use of Pesticides in San Joaquin County, dated March, 2000:

- Anticoagulants. Establish bait stations using the approved rodenticide anticoagulants Chlorophacinone or Diphacinone. Rodenticides shall be used in compliance with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency label standards and as directed by the San Joaquin County Agricultural Commissioner.
- Zinc Phosphide. Establish bait stations with non treated grain 5 7 calendar days in advance of rodenticide application, then apply Zinc Phosphide to bait stations. Rodenticides shall be used in compliance with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency label standards and as directed by the San Joaquin County Agricultural Commissioner.
- Fumigants. Use below ground gas cartridges or pellets and seal burrows. Approved fumigants include Aluminum Phosphide (Fumitoxin, Phostoxin) and gas cartridges sold by the local Agricultural Commissioner's office. NOTE: Crumpled newspaper covered with soil is often an effective seal for burrows when fumigants are used. Fumigants shall be used in compliance with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency label standards and as directed by the San Joaquin County Agricultural Commissioner.
- Traps. For areas with minimal rodent populations, traps may be effective for eliminating rodents. If trapping activities are required, the use of , shall be consistent with all applicable laws and regulations.

If the measures described above were not attempted or were attempted but failed, and burrowing owls are known to occupy the project site, then the following measures shall be implemented:

- During the non-breeding season (September 1 through January 31) burrowing owls occupying the project site should be evicted from the project site by passive relocation as described in the California Department of Fish and Game=s Staff Report on Burrowing Owls (Oct., 1995)
- During the breeding season (February 1 through August 31) occupied burrows shall not be disturbed and shall be provided with a 75 meter protective buffer until and unless the TAC, with the concurrence of the Permitting Agencies= representatives on the TAC; or unless a qualified biologist approved by the Permitting Agencies verifies through non-invasive means that either: 1) the birds have not begun egg laying, or 2) juveniles from the occupied burrows are foraging independently and are capable of independent survival. Once the fledglings are capable of independent survival, the burrow can be destroyed.

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