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***Impacts determined not to be significant are addressed in this EIR under **Section VII, Impacts Determined to be Insignificant**, and have been omitted from the Impact Section of this report.

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IV.E ANIMAL LIFE

INTRODUCTION

The wildlife habitats present on the project site are based on the plant communities and vegetation types described in **Section IV.D, Plant Life**. The habitats present include grassland, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, California walnut woodland, and riparian woodland. The acreage occupied on the site for each of the vegetation types are presented in **Table IV.D-1**, and the distribution of the vegetation on the project site is illustrated on **Figure IV.D-1** in **Section IV.D, Plant Life**.

The following discusses the wildlife resources occurring on the site or expected to occur, based on field surveys conducted on the site as well as on known wildlife habitat requirements and range information. Special-status wildlife occurring or potentially occurring on the site, as well as wildlife movement corridors, are also discussed. Special-status wildlife are species that have been afforded special recognition by federal, state, or local resource agencies or recognized conservation organizations. Where significant impacts are identified, mitigation measures are recommended to reduce such impacts to acceptable levels.

METHODS

Literature Search

As part of the biological analysis of the project site, special attention was afforded to the identification of special-status wildlife species that are known to or potentially occur on the project site. To assist in this identification, the Rarefind application of the California Department of Fish and Game's (CDFG) California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB) was accessed and reviewed for the Beverly Hills, Topanga, Van Nuys, and Canoga Park 7.5-minute U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) quadrangle maps (CNDDB 1997). Other references consulted include publications provided by the CDFG Non-Game Heritage Program, which lists animals considered of concern to CDFG, *California's Wildlife* (CDFG 1988 a,b,c), *Amphibian and Reptile Species of Special Concern in California* (Jennings and Hayes 1994), and *Birds of Southern California – Status and Distribution* (Garrett and Dunn 1981).

Field Surveys

Field surveys were conducted on the project site to document common and special-status wildlife species occurrences, to characterize and assess wildlife habitat quality, and to determine the suitability of on-

site habitats to support special-status species. Wildlife surveys of the site were conducted by Impact Sciences biologists on May 25, 26, 27, and 28, 1996, and May 20, 1997. Because of the nearly impenetrable stands of chaparral and riparian vegetation in some portions of the site, not all areas of the site were surveyed.

To identify small mammal species potentially utilizing on-site habitats, a live-trapping effort was conducted, and two scent stations were established and monitored, from May 26 through 28, 1996. The trapping was conducted in accordance with standard and accepted scientific methodologies.

Two previous zoological studies have been conducted on the site. Kenneth E. Stager, Ph.D., conducted an avian and mammalian survey of the site in 1973 (Stager 1973). Mr. Stager prepared a list of avian and mammalian species that were detected or expected to occur on the property. Michael Brandman Associates (MBA) conducted a biological survey of the site in June 1986 for the preparation of an EIR (MBA 1988). MBA prepared a vegetation map and faunal compendium, assessed the impacts of the proposed project, and suggested mitigation measures to compensate for significant impacts. The results of these two studies were reviewed and incorporated into this report.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Common Wildlife Species

Wildlife species occurring on the project site are generally those common to the Santa Monica Mountains. Wildlife observed or expected to occur on the project site are listed in **Appendix D**. These include several species of reptiles, birds, and small mammals that commonly utilize shrubland and woodland habitats. Larger wildlife species may also utilize the resources present on the project site on a transient basis for forage and refuge. Species observed or expected to occur on the site are discussed below.

Amphibians

The western toad (*Bufo boreas*) was observed during the field surveys. Amphibian species that are expected to occur throughout the existing habitats on the project site include species that are most tolerant of extended periods of time without surface water, such as arboreal salamander (*Aneides lugubris*), black-bellied slender salamander (*Batrachoseps nigriventris*), California chorus frog (*Pseudacris cadaverina*), and Pacific chorus frog (*Pseudacris regilla*).

Reptiles

The varied habitats on the site support several species of reptiles. On-site surveys identified western fence lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*), southern alligator lizard (*Elgaria multicarinatus*), California whipsnake (*Masticophis lateralis*), gopher snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus*), and western rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*). Other reptiles expected to occur include side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), western skink (*Eumeces skiltonianus*), western whiptail (*Cnemidophorus tigris*), racer (*Coluber constrictor*), coachwhip (*Masticophis flagellum*), and common kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getulus*).

Birds

The on-site woodlands provide suitable nesting and foraging habitat for many avian species. Large predatory birds such as the red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) and Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) were observed foraging on the site. Other raptors expected to occur, at least on a transient basis, include turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), and red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*). Other on-site habitats are likely to attract a variety of both local residents and neotropical migrant birds. Smaller birds observed during the spring 1996 and 1997 wildlife surveys include California quail (*Callipepla californica*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), rufous-sided towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), California towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*), lark sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*), violet-green swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*), scrub jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*), bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), California thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*), and European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*).

Mammals

Mammals identified during the on-site surveys and the small mammal trapping include desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*), brush rabbit (*Sylvilagus bachmani*), California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*), Botta's pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*), California pocket mouse (*Chaetodipus californicus*), western harvest mouse (*Reithrodontomys megalotis*), California mouse (*Peromyscus californicus*), deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), dusky-footed woodrat (*Neotoma fuscipes*), desert woodrat (*Neotoma lepida*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*), western spotted skunk (*Spilogale gracilis*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), and mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*). Other mammals expected to occur on site include broad-footed mole (*Scapanus latimanus*), Pacific kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys agilis*), brush mouse (*Peromyscus boylii*), California vole

(*Microtus californicus*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*), striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), mountain lion (*Felis concolor*), and a variety of bat species.

Special-Status Wildlife Species

No animal species listed as rare, threatened or endangered by CDFG or USFWS were observed on site. However, four wildlife species considered of special concern by these resource agencies were observed on site during the field surveys. These species include San Diego desert woodrat, Coastal western whiptail, Cooper's hawk, and Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow. Several other special-status wildlife species potentially occur on the site, but were not observed during the walk-over surveys. These species include the Santa Monica shieldback katydid (*Neduba longipennis*), Coast Range newt (*Taricha torosa torsa*), San Diego horned lizard (*Phrynosoma coronatum)*, San Bernardino ringneck snake (*Diadiphis punctatus modestus*), San Diego mountain kingsnake (*Lampropeltis zonata pulchra*), sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipter striatus*), golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*), northern harrier (*Cirus cyaneus*), white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*), California horned lark (*Eremophila Alepestris actia*), loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), Bell's sage sparrow (*Amphispiza belli belli*), pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*), long-legged myotis (*Myotis volans*), Yuma myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*) and mountain lion (*Felis concolor*). All of these species are addressed in **Appendix D** of this Draft EIR. Those species observed on the site, as well as those with a high to moderate potential to occur based on the presence of suitable habitat and known regional distribution, are also briefly discussed below.

Species Observed on the Site

San Diego desert woodrat *(Neotoma lepida intermedia)*; ***Federal Species of Concern, California Species of Special Concern***. This species' range extends through coastal areas from San Luis Obispo south into Baja California, and inland to the San Bernardino Mountains and Julian (Hall 1981). The nests of this species are typically easily observed. Individual woodrats were captured within chaparral vegetation during the small mammal trapping program conducted at the site in May 1996.

Coastal western whiptail *(Cnemidophorus tigris multiscutatus)*; ***Federal Species of Concern***. The coastal western whiptail occupies the California coastal region from Ventura south to western Baja California, Mexico. It utilizes the open areas among otherwise moderate to dense vegetation. The species also requires loose soil for burrowing. Open coastal sage scrub and mixed chaparral provide suitable habitat for this species. Adult whiptails usually become inactive by early fall, but juveniles

remain active into late fall or early winter. One coastal western whiptail lizard was observed in the coastal sage-chaparral scrub habitat during on-site field surveys.

Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*); ***California Species of Special Concern***. This raptor is a common migrant and rare summer resident in southern California. It breeds in oak woodland habitats and southern cottonwood-willow riparian woodland. The site supports suitable nesting and foraging habitat for this species. Two Cooper's hawks were observed on site during the site survey. However, it was not determined whether these individuals were nesting on the site.

Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps canescens*); ***Federal Species of Concern, California Species of Special Concern.*** This species, which nests on the ground, prefers coastal sage scrub, grassland, and open pine-oak woodland habitats. Several Southern California rufous-crowned sparrows were observed on site within the coastal sage-chaparral scrub vegetation during the site surveys.

Species with a High to Moderate Potential to Occur on the Site

Santa Monica shieldback katydid (*Neduba longipennis*); ***Federal Species of Concern***. This insect species occurs in chaparral and canyon bottom riparian vegetation. This species has also been detected within non-native iceplant vegetation occurring adjacent to these habitats. This species has a moderate potential of occurring near the on-site intermittent stream and within chaparral vegetation.

Coast Range newt (*Taricha torosa torosa*); ***California Species of Special Concern***. This species occurs within the Coast Ranges of southern and central California. It prefers moist areas either in the open or under rocks, logs, and rotting wood in grassland and woodland habitat. Coast Range newts breed in ponds, reservoirs, and slow-moving streams. This species has a high potential of occurring near the on-site intermittent stream.

San Diego horned lizard (*Phrynosoma coronatumi*); ***Federal Species of Concern, California Species of Special Concern***. This lizard species is known to occur in the Santa Monica Mountains. It is commonly associated with open, sandy areas of coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitats, generally where harvester ants, its primary food source, are present. The range of this taxon extends from Kern, Santa Barbara, northern Ventura and Los Angeles Counties south to San Diego County. No San Diego horned lizards or their scat were detected during on-site field surveys. However, suitable habitat is present on site within the coastal sage scrub and chaparral vegetation communities. As such, San Diego horned lizards have a high potential of occurrence on the site.

San Bernardino ringneck snake (*Diadophis punctatus modestus*); ***Federal Species of Concern.*** This is one of eight subspecies of the ringneck snake. This small, very secretive snake occurs in a variety of moist habitats, including oak, walnut, and riparian woodlands, grasslands, chaparral, and coastal sage scrub. It spends most of its time on the ground, under bark, beneath and inside rotting logs, and under stones and boards. The San Bernardino ringneck snake has a moderate potential of occurrence within the chaparral, woodland, and riparian habitats on site.

San Diego mountain kingsnake (*Lampropeltis zonata pulchra*); ***Federal Species of Concern, California Species of Special Concern***. This snake inhabits mountain ranges within Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego Counties. It occupies riparian woodland habitats and canyon bottoms, and adjacent coastal sage scrub and chaparral areas. Rocks or rocky outcrops appear to be an important habitat element. The on-site riparian woodlands and adjacent areas provide suitable habitat for the San Diego mountain kingsnake.

Sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*); ***California Species of Special Concern***. This hawk inhabits most of North America, in woodlands, parks, and residential areas. Breeding takes place in the mountainous coniferous/deciduous forests of northern California, with nests usually near water or riparian areas. The sharp-shinned hawk is a winter visitor to southern California. It forages in the Santa Monica Mountains and has a moderate to high potential for foraging on the site during the winter months.

Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*); ***California Species of Special Concern, California Fully Protected***. This eagle occurs throughout the U.S., Canada, and much of Mexico. Golden eagles forage over large areas of grassland, broken chaparral or coastal sage scrub where they prey upon rabbits and ground squirrels, as well as carrion when mammal prey is scarce. Nesting populations are concentrated in the foothill zone and coastal lowlands of southern California. Although this species is not expected to nest on the site due to lack of suitable nest habitat (rocky ledges and cliffs), golden eagles have a moderate potential of foraging over the site.

Ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*); ***Federal Species of Concern, California Species of Special Concern***. This species occurs in the winter throughout much of California, and breeds from Oregon northwards into Canada. In coastal southern California, this species forages within agricultural fields, grasslands, and open shrublands. This species may occasionally forage on the site during winter.

Northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*); ***California Species of Special Concern.*** This raptor is principally a winter visitor in all regions of southern California although it is known to nest in a variety of locations

in southern California. This species may occasionally forage on the site during winter; however, this raptor is not expected to nest on the site due to lack of suitable nest habitat (primarily marshy grasslands).

White-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*); ***Migratory Bird of Nongame Concern, California Fully Protected.*** White-tailed kites are a common to uncommon, year-round resident of the coastal and lowland valleys. Locally, this raptor nests in riparian woodlands where it uses oak trees and western sycamore trees for nest sites. This species may occasionally forage on the site and potential nesting habitat is present within the southern mixed riparian woodland.

California horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris actia*); ***California Species of Special Concern***. This species occurs in large fields, grasslands, and other open areas. The horned lark builds its nest on the ground. Given that small amounts of suitable open habitat are present on site, California horned larks have a moderate potential for occurrence.

Loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*); ***Federal Species of Concern, California Species of Special Concern***. The loggerhead shrike ranges over most of the continental U.S. and Mexico, and is a resident species in southern California. It inhabits grasslands, agriculture, open chaparral, and desert scrub and is absent only from the mountainous zones. Loggerhead shrikes feed on small reptiles and insects, which they often impale on sticks or thorns before eating. Given that small amounts of suitable open habitat are present on site, loggerhead shrikes have a moderate potential for occurrence.

Bell's sage sparrow (*Amphispiza belli belli*); ***Federal Species of Concern, California Species of Special Concern***. This bird breeds along the coastal slopes from Trinity County south into northwestern Baja California. Locally, it occurs in chaparral habitats, especially chamise chaparral. This species has a moderate to high potential to occur on the site due to the presence of coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitats and the known geographic range of the species.

Pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*); ***California Species of Special Concern***. This species generally inhabits open, lowland areas below 2,000 feet elevation. These bats commonly roost in rock crevices, caves, and beneath rock slabs. Pallid bats emerge late at night, and take large-sized prey including ground dwelling insects. This bat species has a moderate potential of occurring on the site; however, roosting habitat was not observed during the biological surveys of the site.

Long-legged myotis (*Myotis volans*); ***Federal Species of Concern***. The long-eared myotis is widespread in California. This bat is most common in woodland and forest habitats above 4,000 feet. It also forages

in coastal scrub, chaparral, and Great Basin shrub habitats. Long-legged myotis primarily feeds on flying insects. This bat roosts in buildings, rock crevices, spaces under bark, snags, mines, and caves. This bat species has a moderate potential of foraging and roosting on the site.

Yuma myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*)**; *Federal Species of Concern, California Species of Special Concern***. This bat occurs within a variety of habitats from sea level to 11,000 feet elevation. Preferred habitats include open forest and woodlands with sources of water over which to feed. Yuma myotis feeds on a variety of flying insects. This bat roosts in buildings, mines, caves, crevices, abandoned swallow nests, and under bridges. This bat species has a moderate potential of occurring on the site; however, roosting habitat was not observed during the biological surveys of the site.

Wildlife Movement Corridors

Wildlife corridors are generally described as pathways or habitat linkages that connect discrete areas of natural open spaces otherwise separated or fragmented by urbanization, topography, changes in vegetation, and natural factors. The fragmentation of natural habitat creates isolated "islands" of vegetation that may not provide sufficient area or resources to accommodate sustainable populations for a number of species, thus adversely impacting both genetic and species diversity. Corridors mitigate the adverse effects of fragmentation by: (1) allowing animals to move between remaining habitats, which allows depleted populations to be replenished and promotes genetic exchange; (2) providing escape routes from fire, predators, and human disturbances, thus reducing the risk that catastrophic events (such as fire or disease) will result in population or species extinction; and (3) serving as travel paths for individual animals as they wander throughout their home ranges in search of food, water, mates, and other needs, or for dispersing juveniles in search of new home ranges. Preferred travel paths such as game trails, canyon bottoms, and ridgelines within a large natural habitat area are generally not referred to as movement corridors that link disjunct habitats but, rather, pathways to facilitate movement within that habitat patch.

Urban development (i.e., residential housing and a golf course) occurs to the north, northeast, and east of the project site. Native chaparral and riparian woodland vegetation occur immediately to the south of the site, with more urban development occurring approximately 0.9 mile further to the south. Natural vegetation occurs to the west and northwest of the site. The site is located within one of many northwest by southeast trending canyons within the Santa Monica Mountains. Bundy Canyon itself eventually leads to developed areas just south of the site. Wildlife, particularly the larger mammal species such as deer, fox, coyote, bobcat, and mountain lion likely use the canyon bottom and Canyonback ridgeline on the site to facilitate movement within the project site and adjoining natural habitat areas

to the north and northwest. However, based on a review of regional topographic and land use maps, as well as on site reconnaissance, the site itself does not occur within, or serve as, a regional habitat linkage between large open space areas. Therefore, while various wildlife species likely use portions of the site as part of their home range in search of food and water, the site does not currently serve as a regional wildlife movement corridor that links remaining fragmented habitat areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

This section describes potential construction impacts to wildlife resources as a result of project implementation. Adverse impacts on wildlife resources are generally associated with (1) the loss or degradation of habitat for both common and special-status wildlife species as a result of vegetation removal or disturbance, and (2) the loss or displacement of individual animals. The level of significance of potential impacts on these resources is determined by an evaluation of significance criteria (described below) with respect to the overall biological value of a habitat area and/or a specific resource. The relative value of each of the vegetation communities present on site that function as wildlife habitat is measured by such factors as disturbance history, biological diversity, importance to particular wildlife species, uniqueness or sensitivity status, the surrounding environment, and the presence of special-status resources. Direct impacts with respect to specific wildlife resources (i.e., the loss of active nests, dens, and individual animals) are evaluated based on the significance of this loss with respect to regional populations and when impacts on these resources, in and of themselves, could be considered substantial or conflict with certain state and federal laws or regulations.

Impact significance thresholds and the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the proposed project on wildlife resources are described below.

Threshold of Significance

The L.A. CEQA *Thresholds Guide* indicates that a project would normally have a significant impact on biological resources if it could result 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.[1]

Direct Project Impacts

According to Vesting Tentative Tract Map 53072, dated June 06, 2002, the proposed project would add 29 dwelling units and associated infrastructure to the existing Mountaingate Community of approximately 300 residential units. The proposed development envelope, which includes residential lots and associated graded areas as well as infrastructure, encompasses approximately 56.2 acres, with the remaining acreage of the project area to be designated open space. Approximately 93 acres of land would be permanently impacted by grading, improvements, and fuel modification activities associated with project site development. The proposed project would not impact the equestrian / hiking trails that are located within the natural open space areas and, therefore, is not included within this analysis. Impacts with respect to both common and special-status wildlife species are discussed below.

Common Wildlife Species

Construction activity and operation of the proposed project would directly disturb wildlife within, and immediately adjacent to, the development site. Some species are expected to be displaced to adjacent areas of similar habitat, provided it is available at the onset of construction activity. However, wildlife that migrate from the site are vulnerable to mortality by predation and unsuccessful competition for food and territory. In addition, species of low mobility, particularly small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles, could be eliminated during grading activities, thus decreasing on-site populations of these species.

Because of the relatively common nature of most of the wildlife species that would be inadvertently destroyed by construction activities, project implementation is not expected to substantially affect local wildlife populations or cause these populations to drop below self-sustaining levels. However, should grading activities occur during the nesting season of most bird species expected to nest on the project site (approximately March through July), active nests could be destroyed. Depending on the number and extent of active bird nests on the site that may be disturbed or removed, the loss of active nests could be a potentially significant impact. Bird nests with eggs or young are also protected under the Migratory

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1 L.A. CEQA *Thresholds Guide*, City of Los Angeles, Environmental Affairs Department, May 14, 1998, pp. G-5 and G-6.

Bird Treaty Act and the California Fish and Game Code. The loss of an active nest as a result of construction or other site-preparation activities may be in conflict with these regulations.

Special-Status Wildlife Species

No animal species listed as rare, threatened, or endangered by CDFG or USFWS were observed on site. However, several species that are considered of special concern by CDFG or USFWS are present on the site or potentially occur there. For definition of "special status", please see **Appendix D** of this EIR.

Four special-status wildlife species were observed on the project site and a number of other species could potentially occur on the site. The following impact analysis addresses those special-status species actually observed on the site and those with a high potential of occurring on site.

Special-Status Wildlife Species Observed on Site

Coastal western whiptail. This species was observed in the coastal sage-chaparral scrub and is expected to occur within other open habitats on the site. Direct mortality of individuals of this species would probably occur as a result of site preparation and construction activities. There are large amounts of suitable habitat for this species in the region and this species is considered fairly common in the region. However, pursuant to the L.A. CEQA *Thresholds Guide*, the loss of individuals of this special status species would be considered a significant impact.

Cooper's hawk. This species was observed during field surveys conducted on the site. During construction and site preparation activities, individuals of this species occurring within or adjacent to habitat proposed for conversion are expected to move to remaining undisturbed habitat areas on site or in the project vicinity. However, should active nests of this species occur on the site, construction and site preparation activities within or immediately adjacent to suitable nest habitat, if conducted during the nesting season, could result in the direct loss of active nests, including eggs or young, or in the abandonment of an active nest by the adults. Because of its relatively rare status in the region, the loss of an active nest, through either direct loss or nest abandonment, could reduce the number or restrict the range of this special-status species, depending on the number of nests lost or abandoned. The direct loss of eggs or young would also be considered a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the California Fish and Game Code. Impacts to the Cooper's hawk would be a significant impact without the implementation of mitigation measures.

Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow. During construction and site preparation activities, individuals of this species occurring within or adjacent to habitat proposed for conversion are expected to move to remaining undisturbed suitable habitat areas on site, or in the project vicinity. However, should active nests of this species occur on the site, construction and site preparation activities within, or immediately adjacent to, suitable nest habitat, if conducted during the nesting season, could result in the direct loss of active nests, including eggs or young, or in the abandonment of an active nest by the adults. Because of its relatively rare status in the region, the loss of an active nest through either direct loss or nest abandonment, could reduce the number or restrict the range of this special-status species, depending on the number. The direct loss of eggs or young would also be considered a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the California Fish and Game Code. Impacts to the Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow would be a significant impact without the implementation of mitigation measures.

San Diego desert woodrat. Direct mortality of individuals of this species could occur as a result of site preparation and construction activities. There are large amounts of suitable habitat for this species in the region and this species is considered fairly common in the region. However, pursuant to the L.A. CEQA *Thresholds Guide*, the loss of individuals of this special status species would be considered a significant impact.

Special-Status Wildlife Species with a High Potential to Occur on Site

Coast range newt. Individual animals of this species, should they occur on-site and in areas proposed for development, could be lost as a result of grading and construction activities within and adjacent to the intermittent drainage on the site. There are large amounts of suitable habitat for this species in the region and this species is considered fairly common in the region. However, pursuant to the L.A. CEQA *Thresholds Guide*, the loss of individuals of this special status species would be considered a significant impact.

San Diego horned lizard, San Bernardino ringneck snake, and San Diego mountain kingsnake. These species have a high potential for occurring within the grasslands, coastal sage scrub communities, chaparral, and/or oak, walnut, and riparian woodland habitats. Although not observed during the field surveys (these species are secretive and difficult to detect), suitable habitat exists for these species and they are known to occur in similar habitat in the region. Should these species occur on the site prior to project implementation, direct mortality of individuals of these species could occur as a result of site preparation and construction activities. There are large amounts of suitable habitat for this species in the region and this species is considered fairly common in the region. However, pursuant

to the L.A. CEQA *Thresholds Guide*, the loss of individuals of any these special status species would be considered a significant impact.

Sharp-shinned hawk, white-tailed kite, loggerhead shrike, and Bell's sage sparrow. During construction and site preparation activities, individuals of these species occurring within or adjacent to habitat proposed for conversion are expected to move to remaining undisturbed suitable habitat areas on site, or in the project vicinity. However, should active nests of these species occur on the site, construction and site preparation activities within, or immediately adjacent to, suitable nest habitat, if conducted during the nesting season, could result in the direct loss of active nests, including eggs, young, or the abandonment of an active nest by the adults. Because of their relatively rare status in the region, the loss of an active nest through either direct loss or nest abandonment, could reduce the number or restrict the range of these special-status species, depending on the number. Additionally, the direct loss of eggs or young would also be considered a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the California Fish and Game Code. Project impacts would be significant without the implementation of mitigation measures.

Wildlife Movement

While implementation of the project would eliminate portions of existing habitat along the eastern edge of the remaining open space available to wildlife west of the Sepulveda Pass, potentially resulting in the loss of individual special-status animals or plants, it does not represent an important regional habitat linkage between open space areas. Therefore, impacts to wildlife movement as a result of the project's implementation would not be considered a significant impact.

Indirect Impacts

Indirect impacts on wildlife resources would be incurred within those habitat areas surrounding the development envelope, as well as in remaining habitat areas within the proposed development area, after the completion of the proposed project. It is expected that implementation of the proposed project would result in indirect impacts to wildlife resources in the following ways:

- an increased use of the area by humans and domestic animals;
- an increase in populations of non-native wildlife species associated with an urban environment;
- increased light and glare; and
- increased habitat degradation from construction and grading activities.

Indirect impacts associated with the proposed project are not quantifiable but are reasonably foreseeable. As such, the discussion that follows provides a common sense identification of the types of indirect impacts and their relative magnitude such that decision makers and the general public are aware of the indirect impact potential associated with implementation of the proposed project.

Increased Human and Domestic Animal Presence

The project site is located within the existing Mountaingate Community and adjacent to residential developments, golf course and hiking trails, all of which have introduced human presence in the area. Implementation of the proposed 29 dwelling unit project would introduce an additional human population of approximately 85 persons to the currently undeveloped project site. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would increase human and domestic animal presence in the area. Because the increase of humans and domestic animals associated with the project is considered nominal, and because there is already a presence of humans and domestic animals associated with the existing adjacent urban development, this increase is not considered a significant impact on remaining open space.

Increase in Populations of Non-Native Wildlife Species

Currently, the undeveloped project site supports native plant species. Implementation of the proposed project would alter this condition. After project completion, a number of non-native plant and wildlife species which are more adapted to urban environments are expected to increase in population. Within undeveloped areas on the project site, the replacement of existing habitat with non-native or ornamental landscaping would result in the elimination (through emigration) of the majority of animal species typical of a natural setting. These animals would be replaced with a fauna composed of species tolerant of, or dependent upon, a human presence along the urban/natural open space area interface. This includes non-native species such as European starling, Norway rat, house sparrow, Virginia opossum, and red foxes, resulting in diminished wildlife species diversity at the development edge. These and other wildlife would disproportionately utilize natural habitats located within and surrounding the development, which may displace other native wildlife species because of their ability to compete more effectively for nest sites and food.

It is unknown to what degree non-native species would displace native wildlife species remaining on the project site. Animals typical of an urban environment already occur in the area particularly in association with the adjacent existing development, development of the proposed project would exacerbate an already adverse condition. While, the increase in non-native flora and fauna could

adversely affect native wildlife populations along the urban / natural open space area interface and in the immediate vicinity, this increase is not expected to be substantially beyond current levels, or reduce native populations to below self-sustaining levels. Therefore, the increase in non-native animal species, while adverse, is not considered a significant impact.

Increased Light and Glare

Existing nighttime lighting of the Mountaingate Community includes streetlights, automobile lights, porch lighting and light emanating from houses. Overall residential lighting is subdued compared to that of commercial and retail areas within the city. Nighttime illumination is known to adversely impact animals in natural areas. Nighttime light can disturb resting and foraging and can potentially alter breeding cycles and nesting behavior. Project implementation would increase the number of nighttime light sources on the site. If uncontrolled, such light, where proximal to remaining natural areas, could adversely impact the animal species composition that occurs in these areas.

The potential disruption to breeding and nesting cycles and behavior of wildlife species remaining on the project site as a result of increased nighttime lighting and glare could substantially affect native wildlife species, including special-status species, in adjoining open space habitats. Therefore, this increase in light and glare on wildlife species is considered a significant impact.

Construction and Grading Operations

Construction and grading activities associated with project implementation can result in the increased degradation of remaining natural habitat areas within the project site boundary and of adjacent habitats. Indirect impacts on wildlife resources include the following:

- the loud noise associated with construction and grading machinery can disrupt breeding wildlife, particularly nesting bird species;
- the operation of construction and grading machinery, particularly in turnaround zones, can inadvertently trample or result in the inadvertent loss of wildlife habitat and, possibly, individual animals; and
- the leakage of gasoline, oil, and other toxic chemicals and compounds from on-site machinery or materials can adversely impact wildlife resources on or adjacent to the project site.

Depending upon the amount and extent of these impacts, these activities can substantially affect remaining wildlife habitat and, possibly, special-status animal species; therefore, impacts resulting from construction and grading operations are significant.

Cumulative Impacts

As previously discussed, each of the vegetation communities on the project site provides habitat for a variety of common wildlife species and some special-status species. When viewed individually, the loss of each of the wildlife habitat area (vegetation community) on the project site may not represent a substantial loss of wildlife habitat. However, most wildlife species depend on a variety of habitat types to meet various ecological and life history requirements (i.e., food, shelter, nesting). When considered together, the total loss of wildlife habitat on the site is approximately 93 acres. This represents a net loss of wildlife habitat that cannot be entirely replaced at the same qualitative and quantitative level.

With respect to region-wide development, the proposed project is located in a portion of the eastern Santa Monica Mountains which has become increasingly urbanized. Ongoing urban development in this region has resulted in removal, fragmentation, and disruption of natural vegetation communities that serve as cover, foraging, and breeding habitat for both common and special-status wildlife species. This trend will likely continue in the future, further reducing and fragmenting wildlife habitat in region. The loss of approximately 93 acres of valuable wildlife habitat on the site, together with the ongoing loss of this habitat in the region, represents a substantial loss of wildlife habitat, Because of the relatively high value of this habitat for wildlife species, and in accordance with Section 15355(a) of the CEQA *Guidelines*, this loss is considered a significant cumulative impact of the project.

MITIGATION MEASURES

The following describes measures proposed to avoid, minimize, or reduce significant and potentially significant impacts to biological resources. Many of the measures, if successfully implemented, would reduce the degree of these impacts to a level that is less than significant. In addition, these measures would minimize the potential of violating State and Federal laws and regulations protecting certain animal species.

Common and Special-Status Bird Nests

1. Prior to any site preparation activities or construction which would occur during the nesting/breeding season of native bird species (typically March through July), a field survey shall be conducted by a qualified biologist to determine if active nests of special-status birds or common bird species protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and/or the California Fish and Game Code are present in or within 50 feet (300 feet for raptors) of the construction zone.

These surveys shall be conducted no earlier than 45 days and no sooner than 20 days prior to site preparation activities. If active nests are found, a fence barrier shall be erected around each nest site at a minimum distance of 300 feet from raptor nests, 100 feet from special-status songbird nests, and 50 feet from common songbird nests (this distance may vary depending on the bird species and construction activity, as determined by the biologist). No construction or clearing activities shall be permitted, at the discretion of the biologist, within this nest zone until the young birds have fledged and are no longer dependent upon the nest tree or plant, as determined by the project biologist. The biologist shall serve as a construction monitor during those periods when construction activities will occur near active nest areas to ensure that no inadvertent impacts to these nests will occur.

Special Status Amphibians and Reptiles

2. Immediately prior to construction or grading activities, or as these activities are commencing, a survey shall be conducted by a qualified biologist to determine if individuals of coast range newt or the Coastal western whiptail occur within the construction or grading zone. If located, individuals of this species, or any other special-status reptile or amphibian species observed during the survey, shall be captured and translocated unharmed into areas of appropriate habitat (either on site or immediately off site) that are not subject to disturbance.

Light and Glare

3. All lighting along the perimeter of natural areas shall be downcast luminaries with light patterns directed away from natural areas, as coordinated with the lighting engineer and the project biologist.

Construction and Grading Operations

The following construction guidelines shall be followed in order to reduce potential significant impacts to remaining biological resources:

4. An approved biologist shall be retained as a construction monitor to ensure that incidental construction impacts on biological resources are avoided or minimized. Responsibilities of the construction monitor include the following:

    - Attend appropriate pre-grade meetings to ensure that timing/location of construction activities do not conflict with mitigation requirements (e.g., seasonal surveys for wildlife).

- Supervise cordoning of preserved natural areas (i.e., active bird nests) that lie outside of grading areas.

- Conduct a field review of the staking (to be set by the surveyor) designating the limits of all construction activity. Any construction activity areas immediately adjacent to sensitive habitat areas or other special-status resources may be flagged or temporarily fenced by the monitor, at their discretion.

- Conduct meetings with the contractor and other key construction personnel describing the importance of restricting work to designated areas. The monitor should also discuss procedures for minimizing harm / harassment of wildlife encountered during construction.

The monitor should be present periodically on the site during construction to coordinate and monitor compliance with the above provisions.

5. Construction personnel shall be prohibited from entry into areas outside the designated construction area, except for necessary construction related activities, such as surveying. All such construction activities shall be coordinated with the biologist construction monitor.

6. Care should be taken to avoid degradation of the area through spillage of hazardous materials and discarded refuse. No refueling, changing of oil or other fluids, or discarding of any trash or other unwanted materials should be performed on or immediately adjacent to the project site. Vehicles carrying supplies, such as concrete, should not be allowed to empty, clean out, or otherwise place materials into natural areas on or immediately adjacent to the site.

7. Standard dust control measures shall be implemented to reduce impacts on nearby wildlife habitat. This includes a variety of options to reduce dust including replacing ground cover in disturbed areas as quickly as possible; minimizing / reducing vehicle speeds on unpaved roads; watering active sites at least twice daily; and suspending all excavating and grading operations when wind speeds (as instantaneous gusts) exceed 25 mph.

CUMULATIVE IMPACT MITIGATION MEASURES

When viewed individually, it may be possible for each ongoing or planned development project in the region to mitigate potential project-specific significant impacts through the implementation of habitat replacement programs and the requirements of the regulatory processes to which each of the projects may be subject (e.g., ACOE 404 permit process, CDFG Section 1603 permit process, etc.). With respect to this project, measures to mitigate the loss of some areas of wildlife habitat (i.e., vegetation and plant communities) are addressed under **Section IV.D, Plant Life**.

ADVERSE EFFECTS

Implementation of the measures described above will reduce the impacts on common and special-status bird nests, special-status amphibians and reptiles, and on biological resources as a result of increased human and domestic animal presence, increased non-native plant and animal species, increased light and glare, and construction and grading operations to less than significant levels.

Implementation of the measures described in **Section IV.D, Plant Life**, will minimize the loss of wildlife habitat. However, the net loss of approximately 93 acres of wildlife habitat cannot be entirely replaced at the same qualitative and quantitative level as currently exists. Therefore, the net loss of wildlife habitat will remain a significant unavoidable impact.