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Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle Mitigation Plan

For

Rio Del Oro

Sacramento County, California

Superseded Date: 11 September 2007

Original Date: 18 January 2006

Prepared for:
Elliott Homes, Inc.
and
GenCorp Real Estate



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1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At the request of Elliott Homes, Inc. and GenCorp Real Estate, Gibson and Skordal conducted a Valley elderberry longhorn beetle (VELB) and elderberry shrub survey during the summer of 2000 within the Rio del Oro property (Project Area). The property is located north of Douglas Road, south of White Rock Road, and east of Sunrise Boulevard in Sacramento County, CA (Figure 1. *Project Site and Vicinity*). The ±3,829 acre site corresponds to portions of Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 31, and 32, Townships 8 and 9 North, and Range 7 East, Mount Diablo Base Meridian (MDBM) of the "Carmichael, California" and "Buffalo Creek, California" 7.5-minute topographic quadrangles (U.S. Department of the Interior, Geological Survey, photorevised 1993).

Gibson and Skordal completed a series of elderberry surveys during July and August of 2000. The survey effort adhered to the current established conservation guidelines for the VELB (USFWS 1999). A total of 329 elderberry shrubs were identified in the Project Area, the majority of which are scattered throughout the dredge tailings on-site (Figure 2. *Elderberry Shrub Locations*). The elderberry shrubs observed within the Project Area range in size from small shrubs to large size trees. Forty-two (42) elderberry shrubs exhibit VELB evidence in the form of apparent exit holes, comprising approximately 13% of the total existing shrubs within the Project Area. Elderberry survey data are summarized in Attachment A.

The Valley elderberry longhorn beetle (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*) became listed as a threatened species in 1980 (Federal Register 45: 52803-52807). As a result, impacts to potential VELB habitat require mitigation measures in general compliance with the requirements outlined in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Conservation Guidelines for the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle (USFWS 1999).

1.1 Project Implementation

The proposed project will involve grading and filling activities to establish construction grade and installation of infrastructure for a master-planned community on the $\pm 3,829$ – acre parcel.

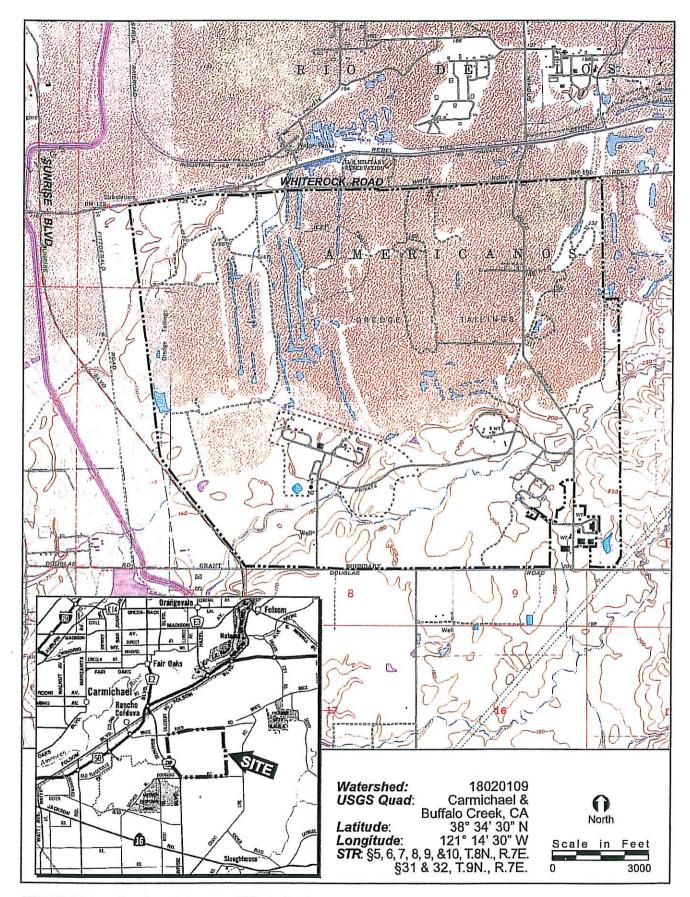


FIGURE 1. Project Site and Vicinity



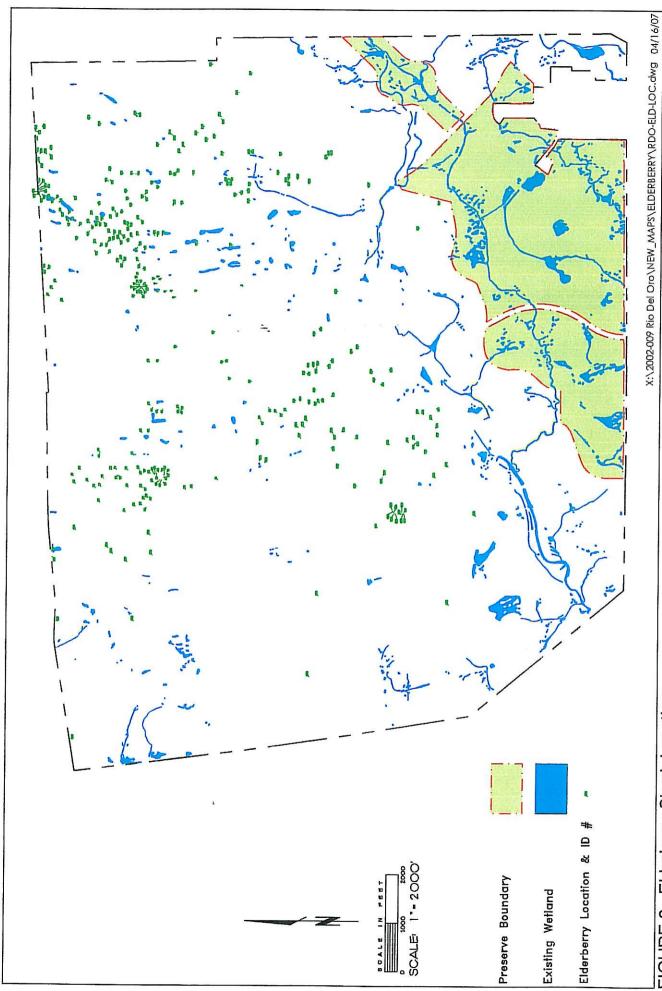


FIGURE 2. Elderberry Shrub Locations

ECORP Consulting, Inc. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS

2002-009 Rio Del Oro

The proposed land use plan includes high, medium, and low-density residential, retail/commercial, office, park, schools, wetland preserve, and open space areas.

The current land use plan will directly impact 292 of the elderberry shrubs within the Project Area. On behalf of Elliott Homes Inc. and GenCorp Real Estate, ECORP Consulting, Inc. conducted an analysis of the required mitigation measures necessary to compensate for this total net loss. Mitigation calculations followed the compensation requirements outlined in the USFWS VELB Conservation Guidelines (USFWS 1999). These guidelines define mitigation measures based on the number of stems by diameter classes at ground level, the presence or absence of evidence/exit holes, and whether the elderberry shrubs occur in riparian habitats. Each of the 292 impacted shrubs are proposed for transplantation. An additional 2,997 elderberry seedlings and 3,869 associated natives will be planted and protected within conservation areas totaling 22-acres (Figure 3. *Elderberry Mitigation Area*). Thirty-seven (37) shrubs will remain in two on-site elderberry habitat preserves.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This document provides information pertaining to the life history, habitat requirements, and threats posed to the elderberry habitat within the Project Area. This report summarizes VELB mitigation measures for the Project and describes how the proposed compensation measures comply with the USFWS Conservation Guidelines for the VELB (USFWS 1999). The ultimate goal of mitigation measures presented in this report is to avoid and minimize adverse effects on the VELB and the elderberry habitat. Mitigation will be accomplished through a combination of avoidance measures, compensatory mitigation (transplantation, additional plantings, and associated native plantings), and monitoring.

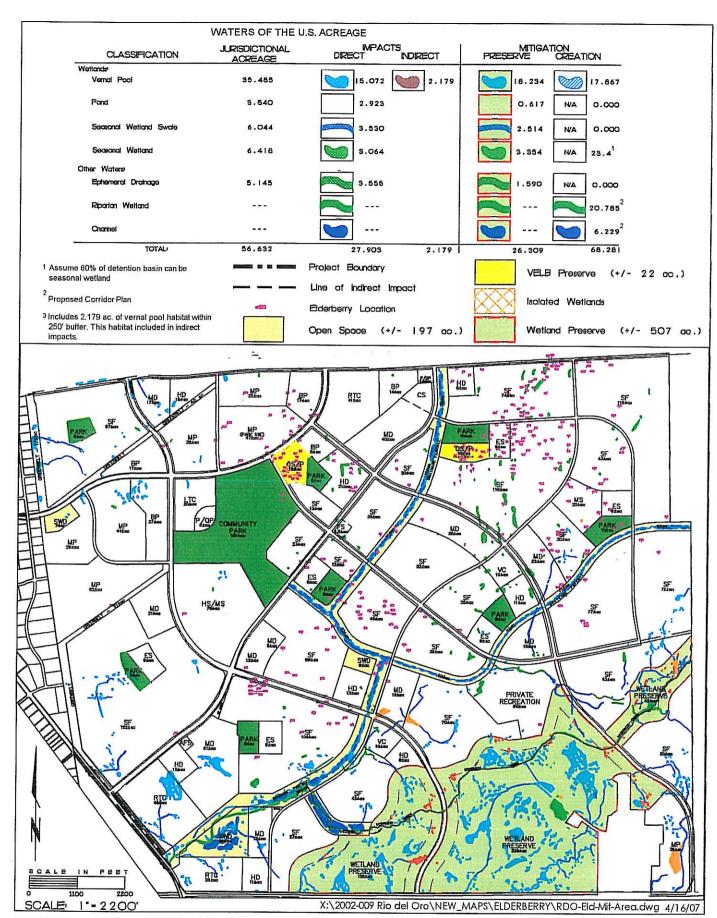


FIGURE 3. Elderberry Mitigation Area



3.0 VELB LIFE HISTORY CYCLE AND OTHER ATTRIBUTES

3.1 Description and Taxonomy

The Valley elderberry longhorn beetle (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*) is a member of the Cerambycidae family and is known from California alone. Subspecies separation is based on distribution and male color pattern variation (Barr 1991). The 'dimorphus' of its name alludes to morphological differences between males and females. Females are typically larger than males, and can grow up to two inches. They have shorter segmented antenna, and have dark metallic green forewings with red margins. The male's antenna is at least as long as its body and the prominent segmented antenna is what the common name 'longhorn' refers to. Males have red forewings and dark green spots.

3.2 Ecological Relationships

The VELB can only be found in association with its exclusive host plant the elderberry, typically blue elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*) and occasionally red elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*). VELB range is limited and includes all of California's Central Valley from Shasta County in the north to Kern County in the south at elevations below 3,000 feet (Barr 1991). Elderberry shrubs generally occur in riparian communities surrounding the American, San Joaquin, Tule, Kings, Kaweah, and Sacramento rivers and along outlying tributaries of these watersheds (USFWS 1999). They also occur in upland savannah areas adjacent to some riparian habitats.

Early work on the VELB has demonstrated that isolated elderberry shrubs and lone-standing drainages are less likely to support beetle populations than dense elderberry shrubs within riparian communities that have some connectivity to other habitats (Collinge et al. 2001).

3.3 Life Cycle

Adult beetles are present on elderberry shrubs from March through June. Adult males are short lived and survive for only a few days. Females persist for up to a month. They feed exclusively on the leaves and flowers of the host plant. During this time period mating occurs and females

lay their eggs on the stems, leaves, and in bark crevices of elderberry shrubs. Hundreds of oblong, reddish brown eggs are laid which are about 2.5 to 3.0mm long and ridged. The eggs typically hatch within 24 to 48 hours and small larvae emerge. The larvae burrow themselves into the plant stems immediately. VELB larvae remain inside the elderberry stems for 1 to 2 years feeding on its pith. Their feeding activities create a distinctive gallery (feeding chamber) that is a hollow tunnel filled with frass and shredded wood (Barr 1991). Larvae mature and eventually pupate into adults. Adult beetles then chew an exit hole and emerge out of the shrub completing the life cycle. Although few researchers have seen adult beetles, their exit holes are often visible. Exit holes are circular or oval and are typically 5 to 15 mm. in diameter. Most exit holes are located in the basal portions of elderberry stems, generally not above heights of 4 feet.

3.4 Habitat Requirements

Elderberry shrubs are a common component of the Central Valley's lush riparian forests. This distinctive plant community surrounds the region's rivers, streams, and numerous watershed tributaries. The VELB appears to occur more frequently in thick riparian stands with high elderberry densities as opposed to sparse and highly fragmented riparian habitats.

3.5 Threats

Habitat loss and fragmentation are the most significant threats to the VELB. It is estimated that over 90% of the riparian habitat in California has been removed over the last century. Agricultural activities and conversion, suburban and urban development, aggregate mining sites, channelization, infrastructures such as damns and levees, and flood control practices continue to replace the riparian forests throughout the state. In addition to habitat loss and fragmentation, exotic and invasive species pose a threat to the beetle. In particular the Argentine ant (*Linepithema humile*), an introduced species in riparian habitats, is a major threat to the distribution and survival of the VELB. Pesticide and herbicide use, insecticidal drift from fields and orchards, pollution and inappropriate chemical disposal, over grazing, and general mismanagement are several other factors contributing to the VELB demise.

4.0 MITIGATION MEASURES

The following VELB habitat mitigation plan has been prepared for the Rio del Oro site to mitigate known and potential direct and indirect impacts to elderberry shrubs within the proposed development areas of the project. A summary of proposed compensation (i.e., plantings or mitigation unit purchase) for direct and indirect impacts is included in Table 1.

able 1 - Proposed Elderberry Impacts and Mitigation								
		N	umber of Ster	ns		1,000		
	Exit	(1	by Diameter)	at	Elderberry	Associated		
Location	Holes	AV.	Ground Level		Plantings	Native		
	Present	1" to 3"	> 3" & < 5"	<u>≥</u> 5"	Required	Plantings Required		
Non-Riparian	No	27 -	÷- 3	5	48	48		
Riparian	No	568	115	149	2077	2077		
Non-Riparian	Yes	1	0	2	14	28		
Riparian	Yes	95	21	44	858	1716		
				Subtotal:	2997	3869		

Total Plantings: 6866 Number of Transplants: 292

Total Credits: 686.6

Total Onsite Credits: 532.4 Credits Needed: 154.2

Based on the 2,997 elderberry plantings, plus the 3,869 associated native plantings, there is a total of 6,866 plantings that are required for mitigation, which is the equivalent of 686.6 credits. There are 10 plantings, 5 elderberry seedlings and 5 associated Natives, per credit. In order to convert the credits into acreages, 686.6 is multiplied by 1,800 square feet, which equals 1,235,880 square feet or 28.37 acres. Onsite, there is a total of 22 acres designated for mitigation, which will accommodate 532.4 onsite credits. This leaves a balance of 154.2 credits, or 6.37 acres of habitat that will be purchased at an offsite mitigation bank.

ECORP Consulting has contacted various VELB mitigation banks to inquire about available VELB credits. To date, three mitigation banks, or combination of banks, have been identified that could provide the balance of VELB credits needed for the Rio del Oro project. The USFWS has also indicated that service-area restrictions are no longer a factor, which should allow for more banks to offer mitigation for the Rio del Oro project.

4.1 Regulatory Context

Impacts to VELB habitat are subject to compliance with the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). According to general compensation quidelines for impacts to VELB, as stipulated by the Guidelines (USFWS 1999), VELB habitat avoidance should be a priority. Complete avoidance can be assumed when a 100-foot buffer would be established and maintained around all elderberry plants containing stems measuring one inch or greater in diameter at ground level. Encroachments into the 100-foot buffer require USFWS approval and may require mitigation for indirect impacts. If avoidance is not feasible, the Guidelines recommend transplantation of all existing elderberries that cannot be avoided by the project to a conservation area, and the establishment of new elderberry plants and associated native vegetation within the conservation area. This requires an incidental take permit issued by the USFWS. Replacement ratios for impacts (i.e., transplanted or destroyed) to elderberry stems one inch or greater in diameter at ground level, range from 1:1 to 8:1 (new plantings to affected stems). These ratios are based on stem size class, presence or absence of exit holes (evidence of VELB use), and location (riparian or non-riparian). For example, a replacement ratio of 1:1 is specified for elderberry shrubs located within non-riparian communities, with no evidence of VELB use and stems between one and three inches at ground level. A 4:1 replacement ratio is specified for shrubs where VELB evidence is apparent, stems are between one and three inches in diameter, and the shrub is riparian in habitat. An 8:1 replacement ratio is specified for elderberry shrubs where VELB evidence is apparent, stems are greater than five inches in diameter, and the shrub is located in a riparian community.

The Guidelines also describe recommended methods and timing for transplantation and planting activities, as well as habitat protection measures. The Guidelines indicate that recent studies have shown that VELB are more abundant in dense native plant communities, with mature overstory and mixed understory. Consequently, establishment of various native plants, at a given ratio to elderberries, is recommended. Compensation VELB habitat is typically monitored over a 10-year period.

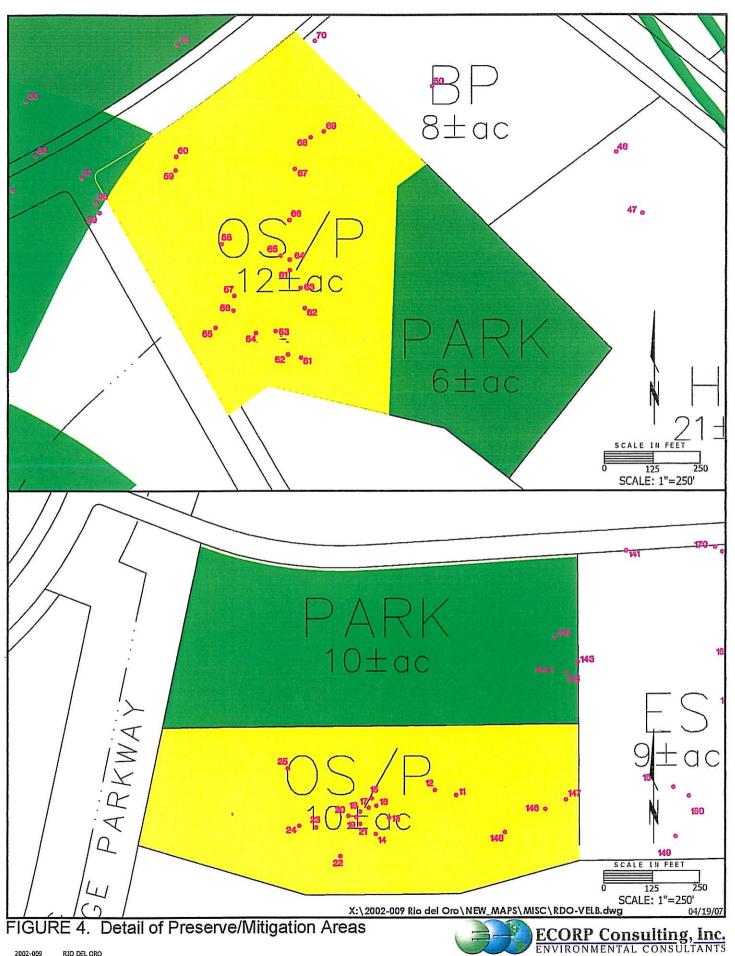
The following mitigation measures have been prepared specifically for the Rio del Oro Project Area to address direct and indirect impacts to the 292 elderberry shrubs within the Project Area.

These mitigation measures adhere to and satisfy the recommendations of the USFWS Conservation Guidelines for the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle (USWFS 1999). Mitigation will be accomplished through a combination of avoidance, transplantation into designated preserves, compensatory mitigation (additional elderberry plantings and associated native plantings), and monitoring efforts.

4.2 Avoidance/Protection

Two designated elderberry habitat preserves totaling 22-acres have been established within the Project Area (see Figure 3). Preserve #1 is located in the northwest corner of the site and has 19 existing elderberry shrubs that will be avoided and permanently protected. Preserve #2 is located in the northeastern corner of the site and supports 18 elderberry shrubs (Figure 4. *Detail of Preserve/Mitigation Areas*). These shrubs will also be avoided during the project activities and permanently protected. As recommended in the USFWS guidelines (USFWS 1999), these areas will be fenced off during construction and a 100-foot buffer zone will be established with brightly colored pin-flags. Contractors working in the vicinity of the preserves will be briefed on the need to avoid damaging the elderberry shrubs and forewarned regarding the consequences for not complying with these instructions. The members of the various work crews will also be informed about the status of the beetle and the need to protect its elderberry host. Signs indicating the necessary information, as outlined in the USFWS guidelines (USFWS 1999), will be erected every 50 feet along the edges of the avoidance/preservation areas.

Following construction activities, both of the elderberry preserves will be fenced and monitored as stipulated in the Mitigation Plan for Rio del Oro and the project's long-term Operations and Management Plan. During future monitoring efforts, particular attention will be given to ensure that the avoided elderberry bushes survive and thrive (i.e., maintenance of fencing and signs, weed control, trash removal, etc.). These preserve areas will be permanently fenced and will be protected by deed restrictions and conservation easements. The property will be managed as wildlife habitat in perpetuity. Such management will be funded by an endowment established by the applicant (Elliott Homes, Inc. and GenCorp Real Estate) and carried out by the City of Rancho Cordova or a third-party conservation entity.



4.3 Transplantation

As part of project mitigation plan implementation, the 292 elderberry shrubs that will be impacted by the project activities will be transplanted into the designated elderberry preserve areas and/or off-site locations. Transplantation activities will be conducted according to the recommendations supplied by the USFWS guidelines. Elderberry shrubs will be transplanted to the two conservations areas on the Rio del Oro site. Transplantation will occur at the appropriate time of year and a qualified biological monitor will observe all transplantation acts. The actual elderberry shrub transplanting will be conducted according to the "Transplanting Procedure" which is also outlined in the USFWS guidelines (USFWS 1999).

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4.4 Additional Plantings

According to the USFWS guidelines, each elderberry stem with a diameter measuring 1.0 inch or greater that is adversely affected must be replaced. This includes all impacted elderberry shrubs, even if they are proposed transplants (USFWS 1999). According to ECORP Consulting, Inc.'s mitigation calculations, a total of 2,997 additional elderberry plantings are required to mitigate the impacts to existing shrubs that will ensue from the project activities (Table 1). The calculated additional plantings will be placed into the two designated elderberry habitat preserves.

4.5 Associated Native Plantings

According to USFWS, the VELB seems to prefer densely populated native plant communities, in which multiple elderberry shrubs are scattered throughout an established overstory layer and a diverse native understory layer. As such a total of 3,869 associated native plantings will be established in addition to elderberry plants. The types of species used will be determined by a restoration specialist. A list of common plants used in VELB restoration projects is included as Attachment B

4.6 Monitoring and Maintenance

Monitoring of the VELB mitigation preserve areas and corridors will occur over a ten year period, concurrent with monitoring of the greater Rio del Oro Vernal Pool Preserve.

One of the primary goals of this plan is to protect existing and transplanted elderberry shrubs from potential threats to their survival, as a means of safeguarding VELB habitat. Potential threats include excessive competition from invasive non-native vegetation, hydrological changes, herbicide/fertilizer residues, and human disturbances.

Invasive non-native annual plants can also impact VELB populations. Many invasive non-native annuals were introduced into the Sacramento Valley in the 1700's by Spanish missionaries (Barry, 1996). These invasive annuals have since flourished, competing with native grassland and riparian vegetation.

Changes in hydrology can also have a significant impact on VELB habitat. As modifications to the landscape can directly influence the hydrology of riparian and drainage areas, measures need to be implemented to ensure that the hydrology of VELB habitat preserves is not compromised.

In addition, human disturbances such as litter and motorized vehicle disturbance can negatively effect VELB populations. Trash and landscape clippings are often disposed of in preserves and can smother vegetation and introduce exotic non-native plant species into the preserve. Other human disturbance threats include motorized vehicles and foot traffic through designated VELB habitat preserve areas.

The VELB mitigation plantings will be monitored on a yearly basis during the appropriate period (mid-February through June) concurrent with other planned monitoring activities. Adaptive management decisions should be made based upon monitoring results. Elderberry shrubs and the associated native plantings within preserve areas will be surveyed to determine overall health and to assess approximate VELB population size.

4.6.1 Methods

Per USFWS guidelines, the population of valley elderberry longhorn beetles, the general condition of the conversation area, and the condition of the elderberry and associated native plantings in the conservation area will be monitored over a period of ten (10) consecutive years. If conservation planting is done in stages (i.e., not all planting is implemented in the same time period), each stage of conservation planting will have a different start date for the required monitoring time.

4.6.2 Surveys

Each year a minimum of two site visits between February 14 and June 30 will be made by a qualified biologist. Surveys will include:

- A population census of the adult beetles, including the number of beetles observed, their condition, behavior, and their precise locations. Visual counts will be used; markrecapture or other methods involving handling or harassment will not be used.
- 2. A census of beetle exit holes in elderberry stems, noting their precise locations and estimated ages.
- 3. An evaluation of plants and associated native plants within the preserve areas, including the number of plants, their size and condition.
- 4. An evaluation of the adequacy of the fencing, signs, and weed control efforts in the avoidance and conservation areas.
- 5. A general assessment of the habitat, including any real or potential threats to the beetle and its host plants, such as erosion, fire, excessive grazing, off-road vehicle use, vandalism, excessive weed growth, etc.

4.6.3 Reports

A written report, presenting a analyzing the data from the project monitoring will be prepared by a qualified biologist for ten (10) consecutive years. Copies of the report will be submitted by December 31 of the same year to the Service (Chief of Endangered Species, Sacramento fish and Wildlife Office), and the Department of Fish and Game (Supervisor, Environmental Services, Department of Fish and Gem, 1416 Ninth Street, Sacramento, California 95814; and Staff Zoologist, California Natural Diversity Data Base, Department of Fish and Game, 1220 S Street, Sacramento, California 95814). The report will explicitly address the status and progress of the transplanted and planted elderberry and associated native plants and trees, as well as any failings of the conservation plan and the steps taken to correct them. Any observations of beetles or fresh exit holes will be noted. Copies of original field notes, raw data, and photographs of the conservation area will be included with the report. A vicinity map of the site and maps showing where the individual adult beetles and exit holes were observed must be included. For the elderberry and associated native plants the survival rate, condition, and size of the plants will be analyzed. Real and likely future threats will be addressed along with suggested remedies and preventative measures (e.g. limiting public access, more frequent removal of invasive non-native vegetation, etc.).

A copy of each monitoring report, along with the original field notes, photographs, correspondence, and all other pertinent material, will be deposited at the California Academy of Sciences (Librarian, California Academy of Sciences, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, California 94118) by December 31 of the year that monitoring is done and the report is prepared. The Service's Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office will be provided with a copy of the receipt form the Academy library acknowledging receipt of the material, or the library catalog number assigned to it.

4.6.4 Access

Biologists and law enforcement personnel from the California Department of Fish and Game and the Service will be given complete access to the project site to monitor transplanting activities. Personnel from both these agencies will be given complete access to the project and the conservation area to monitor the beetle and its habitat in perpetuity.

4.6.5 Success Criteria

A minimum survival rate of at least 60 percent of the elderberry plants and 60 percent of the associated native plants will be maintained throughout the monitoring period. Within one year of discovery that survival has dropped below 60 percent, the applicant must replace failed plantings to bring survival above this level. The Service will make any determination as to the applicant's replacement responsibilities arising from circumstances beyond its control, such as plants damaged or killed as a result of severe flooding or vandalism.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Gibson and Skordal conducted a VELB survey of the Rio del Oro Project Area during the summer of 2000. Surveys identified 329 elderberry shrubs within the Project Area. Approximately 13% of the identified elderberries had VELB evidence in the form of beetle exit holes. Development of the Rio del Oro project will result in direct impacts to 292 elderberry shrubs. Measures proposed to mitigate direct and indirect impacts to VELB habitat within the Project Area include avoidance of 37 remaining elderberry shrubs within two designated preserve areas (e.g. fencing and monitoring during construction activity) and the transplantation of impacted populations. In addition to the previously mentioned VELB mitigation measures an additional 2,997 elderberry seedlings and 3,869 associated natives will be planted and protected within conservation areas totaling 22-acres. An additional 154.2 VELB credits will be purchased at a USFWS approved mitigation bank. All the VELB habitat preserves will be monitored over a ten year period concurrent with monitoring of the greater vernal pool preserve.

6.0 REFERENCES

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- USFWS. 1999. Conservation Guidelines for Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sacramento Field Office. July 9, 1999.

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Elderberry Shrub Survey Data Summary

Attachment B – Native Plants Used in VELB Restoration

ATTACHMENT A

Elderberry Shrub Survey Data Summary

Elb. Ref. No. 1"-3" 3"-5" >5" Exit Holes Riparian 11 1 1 3 Y Y 15 4 1 1 Y Y 26 3 Y Y Y 32 1 2 Y Y 46 1 1 Y Y 51 1 1 Y Y 68 2 Y Y Y 70 1 1 Y Y Y 73 1 3 1 Y	SHRUBS WITH	HEVIDENC	CE			
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4			1	N	Y
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334	1			N	Υ
335	1	1		Ν	Υ
336			1	N	Υ
337	3	1		Ν	Υ
TOTAL	755	160	236		

ATTACHMENT B

Native Plants Used in VELB Restoration

Native Plants for Use in Restoration

Scientific Name

Trees

Acer negundo Aesculus californica

Alnus rhombifolia Fraxinus latifolia

Juglans californica Platanus racemosa Populus fremontii

Quercus douglasii Quercus lobata Quercus wislizeni Salix exigua

Salix gooddingii Salix laevigata Salix lasiolepis

Common Name

Box elder

California buckeve

White alder Oregon ash

California black walnut Western sycamore Fremont cottonwood

Blue oak Valley oak Interior live oak Narrowleaf willow Gooding's black willow

Red willow Arroyo willow

Shrubs

Baccharis pilularis

Ceanothus cuneatus

Cephalanthus occidentalis

Cercis occidentalis

Fremontodendron californicum

Heteromeles arbutifolia

Mimulus aurantiacus Rhamnus ilicifolia Rhamnus tomentella

Rubus ursinus

Rosa californica Salix exigua

Salix Iasiolepis

Vitis californica

Coyote brush

Wedgeleaf ceanothus

Button-willow Western redbud Flannelbush

Toyon

Bush monkeyflower Hollyleaf redberry Hoary coffeeberry California blackberry

California rose

Narrow-leaved willow

Arroyo willow

California wild grape

Grasses

Bromus carinatus

Elymus elymoides

Elymus glaucus Frestuca idahoiensis

Hordeum branchyantherum

Levmus triticoides Melica californica Muhlenbergia rigens

Nassella pulchra Poa secunda

California brome

Squirreltail Blue wildrye Idaho fescue Meadow barley Creeping wildrye

Oniongrass Deer grass

Purple needle grass One-sided bluegrass