

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Eastern Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area Habitat Protection Project (Martin Property)

Environmental Assessment 18-22-MP



**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Mid-Pacific Region**

March 2018

Mission Statements

The Department of the Interior protects and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provides scientific and other information about those resources; and honors its trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated island communities.

The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.

The mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BNLL	Blunt-nosed leopard lizard
CPNA	Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area
CVP	Central Valley Project
CVPCP	Central Valley Project Conservation Program
FWS	Fish and Wildlife Service
GKR	Giant kangaroo rat
HRP	Habitat Restoration Program
ITA	Indian Trust Assets
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
PCACEC	Panoche-Coalinga Area of Critical Environmental Concern
SJKF	San Joaquin kit fox
SJWT	San Joaquin woolly-threads

Section 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and DOI Regulations (43 CFR Part 46), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) prepared this Environmental Assessment to evaluate and disclose potential environmental impacts associated with providing funding to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to help purchase 1,387.12 acres, contained in four parcels of the Martin property, within the eastern portion of the Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area (CPNA). Reclamation would provide \$462,926 from the Central Valley Project Improvement Act Habitat Restoration Program (HRP) and \$80,000 from the Central Valley Project Conservation Program (CVPCP) to BLM. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) would contribute \$222,074 of HRP funds toward the purchase. BLM prioritized the property based on the property's connectivity with existing protected lands; the habitat on the property is important to the conservation of federally endangered San Joaquin Valley upland species whose populations have been impacted by Reclamation's Central Valley Project (CVP) operations. The Martin property is located on the eastern slope of the Ciervo Hills, a low-lying north-south trending range that forms the western edge of the San Joaquin Valley between Panoche Creek and Cantua Creek at the border of western Fresno County (Figures 1 and 2).

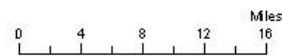
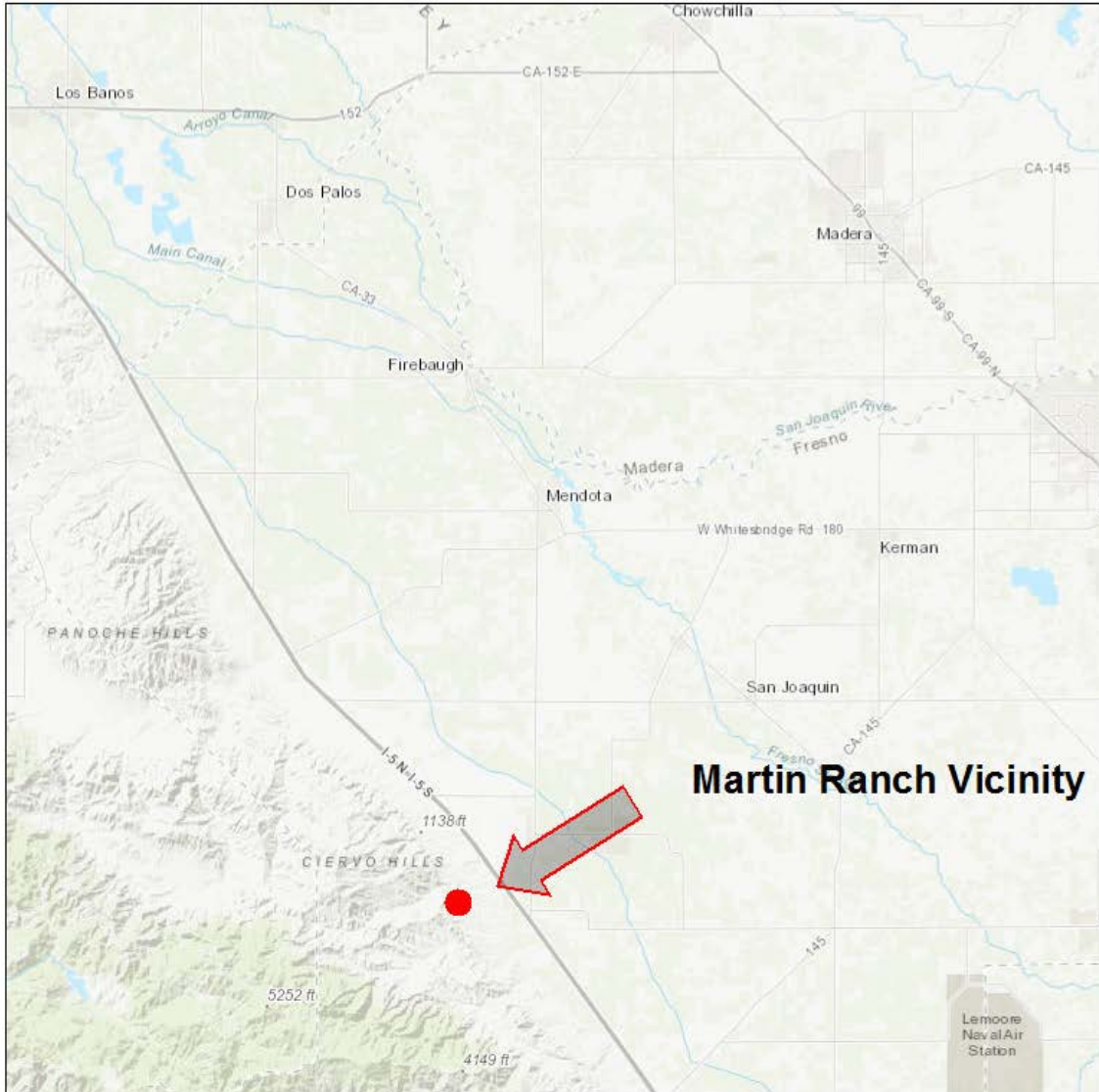
1.2 Need for the Proposal

The CVPCP and HRP help mitigate CVP impacts, and minimize future impacts, on threatened and endangered species. This mitigation was required of Reclamation by State Water Resources Control Board Decision 1641 (D-1641) of December 29, 1999. D-1641 concurred with a Reclamation petition to expand Reclamation's authorized place of use to include certain areas already receiving CVP water. Additionally, D-1641 stated that Reclamation will provide compensation and habitat values that mitigate for impacts associated with the delivery of CVP water to lands previously outside the authorized place of use. The CVPCP and HRP are the main Reclamation programs providing mitigation to meet D-1641 requirements.

The San Joaquin kit fox (SJKF), giant kangaroo rat (GKR), blunt-nosed leopard lizard (BNLL), and San Joaquin woolly-threads (SJWT), federally listed as endangered pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, would benefit from the Martin property acquisition. These species have declined as a direct result of the conversion of arid grasslands and scrublands to irrigated agriculture in the western San Joaquin Valley (USFWS 1998), in part due to the availability of CVP water. Additional threats of habitat loss from large solar developments in the Panoche Valley increases the conservation value of any remaining San Joaquin Valley upland habitats in the Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area.

Martin Ranch Property

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This map is provided as-is and may contain representations of property boundaries. It is intended for general reference only. None of the parties involved in preparing this map or data contained herein warrant or represent information to be complete and accurate, and cannot be held responsible for errors or omissions.

Map created by: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Date: 3/2/2018

Figure 1. Location of the Martin property

Martin Acquisition 1387.12 Acres

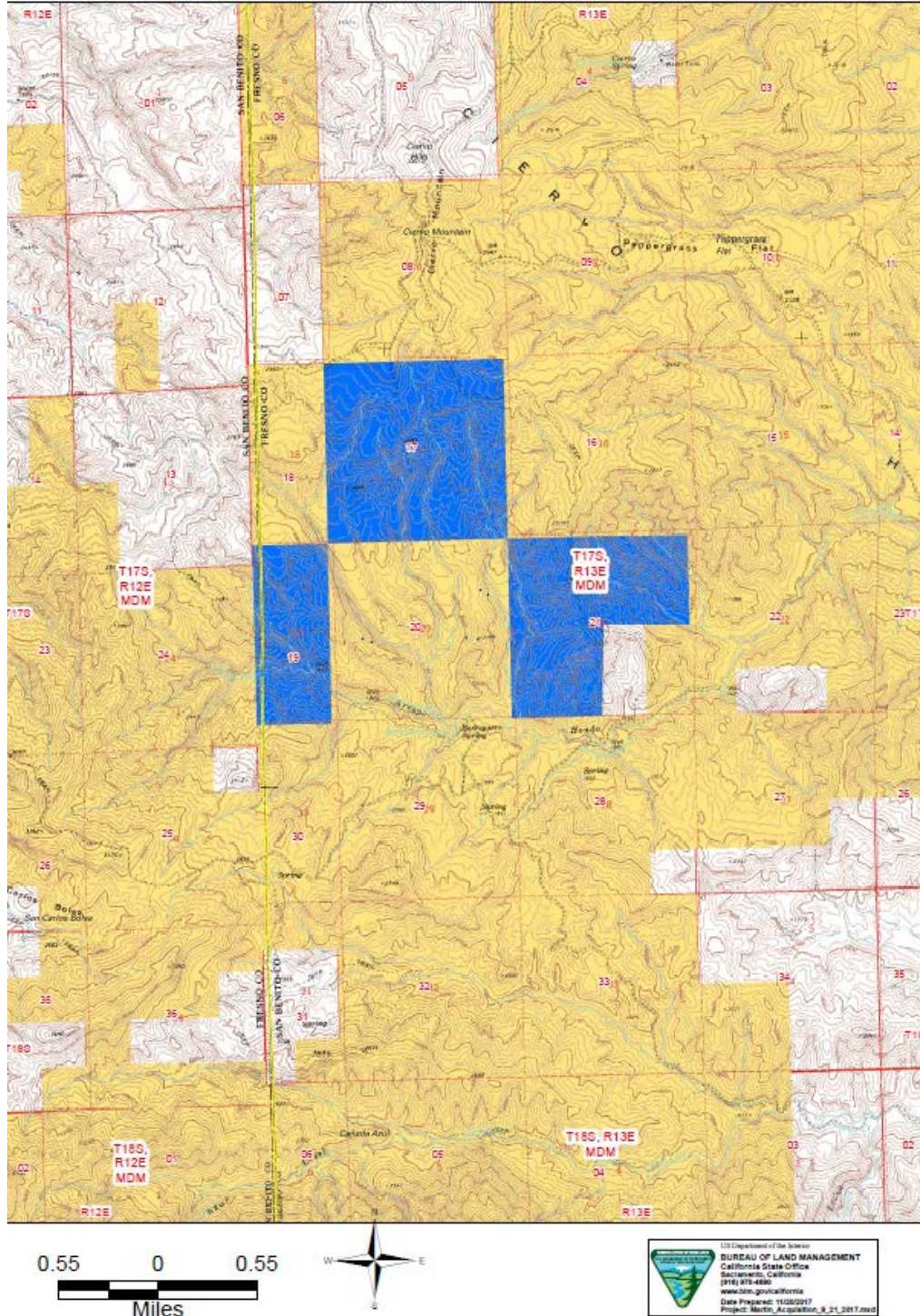


Figure 2. Location of the 1387.12-acre Martin property in western Fresno County

Section 2 Alternatives Including the Proposed Action

2.1 No Action Alternative

Reclamation would not provide a total of \$542,926 to BLM to help purchase 1,387.12 acres in the eastern CPNA. BLM would have to obtain the funds from other public and/or private sources. If the funding cannot be secured, BLM would not be able to purchase the Martin property.

2.2 Proposed Action

Reclamation would provide a total of \$542,926 to BLM to help purchase four parcels of land totaling 1,387.12 acres of the Martin property in the eastern CPNA.

After acquisition of the parcels, BLM would manage the lands consistent with the management goals and objectives of the Panoche-Coalinga Area of Critical Environmental Concern (PCACEC) which would include the Martin property. BLM's goals and objectives for the PCACEC are to manage the lands for the protection of special status species and to promote scientific research and education. Further information is provided in the Resource Management Plan for the Southern Diablo Mountain Range and Central Coast of California, approved September 2007, which describes the approved management actions for lands administered by BLM's Central Coast Field Office, including the PCACEC (USBLM 2007). The acquired parcels would be added to the existing Cantua Ranch grazing allotment (grazing lease 4414). The existing terms and conditions for the Cantua Ranch allotment would also apply to the acquired parcels.

Section 3 Affected Environment & Environmental Consequences

This section identifies the potentially affected environmental resources and the environmental consequences that could result from the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternatives.

3.1 Resources Not Analyzed in Detail

Department of the Interior Regulations, Executive Orders, and Reclamation guidelines require a discussion of the following items when preparing environmental documentation:

3.1.1 Cultural Resources

Reclamation has determined the Proposed Action is the type of activity that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.3(a)(1). As such, Reclamation has no further obligations under Title 54 U.S.C. § 306108, commonly known as Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (See Appendix A).

3.1.2 Indian Trust Assets

Indian Trust Assets (ITAs) are legal interests in property or rights held in trust by the United States for Indian Tribes or individual Indians. Indian reservations, Rancherias, and Public Domain Allotments are common ITAs in California. The nearest ITA to the area of the Proposed Action is a public land allotment, approximately 34 miles east of the project location. The Proposed Action does not have a potential to impact ITAs. (See Appendix B.)

3.1.3 Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898 requires each Federal agency to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations. The Proposed Action would not result in changes in land use or activities on the property that would impact any populations, therefore, there would be no adverse human health or environmental effects to minority or low-income populations.

3.2 Biological Resources

3.2.1 Affected Environment

Upon its purchase by BLM, the Martin property would become part of BLM's San Joaquin Management Area (SJMA). The predominant topographic feature within the SJMA are the rugged Panoche Hills on the eastern edge of the Diablo Range and the western edge of the San Joaquin Valley. The highest elevations are Panoche Mountain (elevation 2,096 feet) and Indian Mountain (elevation 2,384 feet). The vegetation is predominantly annual grassland and annual grassland/shrub. Important shrubs include ephedra (or Mormon tea) and saltbush. Scattered California juniper is the only tree

species present, which occurs in areas of the highest rainfall and moisture. Average annual rainfall varies from four to eight inches per year, with the highest amounts in the northern and western portions of the area. Annual temperatures range from over 100° F in the summer to 40 to 50° F in the winter. Evapotranspiration is high and the area lies in a zone of true desert, within a rain shadow created by the Diablo Range to the west. Low rainfall coupled with extremely erodible soils are ecological factors limiting wildlife and endangered species habitat use and distribution in the area.

The Recovery Plan for Upland Species of the San Joaquin Valley (USFWS 1998) (Recovery Plan) describes the land acquisition efforts of BLM at the CPNA as essential to the recovery of federally listed upland species in the region. The Recovery Plan points specifically to BLM's efforts to acquire lands in western Fresno and eastern San Benito Counties, mainly involving the Martin or Cantua Creek and Silver Creek ranches. It describes how BLM acquisitions in the CPNA and the Carrizo Plain Natural Area collectively have done more to advance the recovery of the San Joaquin Valley's listed species than all others combined. The Proposed Action, in which a portion of the Martin Ranch will be acquired, contributes directly to the goals of the Recovery Plan and will assist BLM in their efforts to further recover upland species in those areas.

San Joaquin kit fox. SJKF have been extensively documented within the CPNA. The population is apparently robust and self-sustaining, but is likely dependent on the preservation of GKR populations there. The Recovery Plan stipulates protection of 90% of SJKF habitat, as existed in 1998, for delisting.

Giant kangaroo rat. The GKR is a keystone species restricted to the San Joaquin Desert of California, whose range has been reduced to 3% of historical, largely due to habitat loss from agricultural development. The range of the species is highly fragmented, with the two main populations (metapopulations) occurring 150 km apart: the northern GKR of the CPNA, and the southern GKR of the Carrizo Plain.

Blunt-nosed leopard lizard. The parcels proposed for acquisition appear to have ecological conditions conducive to BNLL, but the species has not been surveyed in the area. Probability of presence is reasonably high due to the relatively level terrain and the presence of GKR, with which the BNLL appears to co-occur in the CPNA. The protection of BNLL habitat in the CPNA is named in the Recovery Plan as a high priority action for recovery of the species.

San Joaquin woolly-threads. SJWT occurrences in the CPNA represent the northernmost extent of the species' range. The Martin property parcels support non-native grasslands and valley scrub habitats of the type in which SJWT is known to occur. Per the Recovery Plan, the species typically occupies microhabitats with less than 10 percent shrub cover, as is present on the property. The Martin property parcels proposed for acquisition appear to contain suitable habitat for SJWT, but have not been surveyed for the species.

Table 1. Special status species known to occur in the Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area which are present or potentially present on the Martin property parcels.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Federal Status ^a	State Status ^b	Other Designated Species ^c	Species Verified Presence (Y/N) ^d
Mammals:					
Giant kangaroo rat	<i>Dipodomys ingens</i>	E	E	.	Y
San Joaquin antelope squirrel	<i>Ammospermophilus nelsoni</i>	.	T	.	Y
Short-nosed kangaroo rat	<i>Dipodomys nitratooides brevinasus</i>	.	.	SSC	N
San Joaquin kit fox	<i>Vulpes macrotis mutica</i>	E	T	.	N
Tulare grasshopper mouse	<i>Onychomys torridus tularensis</i>	.	.	SSC	N
Birds:					
Swainson's hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>		T	.	N
Northern harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	.		SSC	N
Short-eared owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	.		SSC	N
Burrowing owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	-	.	SSC	N
LeConte's thrasher	<i>Toxostoma lecontei</i>	.		SSC	N
Reptiles:					
Blunt-nosed leopard lizard	<i>Gambelia sila</i>	E	-	FP	N
Coast horned lizard	<i>Phrynosoma blainvillii</i>	.	.	SSC	Y
Plants:					
San Joaquin woolly-threads	<i>Monolopia congdonii</i>	E	.	.	N
Panoche pepper-grass	<i>Lepidium jaredii ssp. album</i>	.	.	CRPR ^e List 1B.2	N
Lost Hills crownscale	<i>Atriplex coronata var. vallicola</i>	.	.	CRPR List 1B.2	N
Pale yellow layia	<i>Layia heterotricha</i>	.	.	CRPR list 1B.1	N
Golden madia	<i>Madia radiata</i>	.	.	CRPR list 1B.1	N
Hall's tarplant	<i>Deinandra halliana</i>	.	.	CRPR list 1B.1	N
Round leaved filaree	<i>California macrophylla</i>	.	.	CRPR list 1B.1	N
Forked fiddleneck	<i>Amsinckia furcate</i>	.	.	CRPR list 4.2	N

Panoche larkspur	<i>Delphinium gypsophilum</i>	.	.	CRPR list 4.2	N
Hoover's wooly-star	<i>Eriastrum hooveri</i>	.	.	CRPR list 4.2	N
San Benito poppy	<i>Eschscholzia hyscoides</i>	.	.	CRPR list 4.3	N

^a E = federally listed as endangered, T = federally listed as threatened,

^b E = state listed as endangered, R = state listed as rare, T= state listed as threatened,

^c SSC = California listed as species of special concern, FP = California fully protected species

^d Species has been confirmed on the actual property/parcel that is proposed for protection

^e CRPR = California Rare Plant Ranking System of the California Native Plant Society

3.2.2 Environmental Consequences

No Action

If Reclamation does not provide funding to assist in the purchase of the Martin property, BLM would have to find additional funds from other sources. If BLM were not able to purchase the property and the owner sells it to another party, the opportunity to acquire additional lands in the CPNA would be lost or jeopardized.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would directly benefit the recovery of several federally-listed species, listed in Table 1, through conservation and adaptive management of their associated habitats on the Martin property.

Acquisition of the Martin property would contribute to BLM's long-range goals of preserving endangered species habitat and promoting species recovery through strategic, targeted land acquisitions and subsequent management activities to optimize habitat conditions. Management activities include prescribed livestock grazing, habitat restoration, and research. The objective of BLM's strategy is to preserve and enhance core populations of endangered species identified by the Recovery Plan as being present in the CPNA. Recent land acquisitions by BLM through funding assistance by the CVPCP and HRP have secured a significant buffer zone along the eastern edge of Ciervo Hills. In the future, BLM may purchase more parcels from willing sellers in the CPNA, to conserve additional habitat between Pleasant Valley (Coalinga) and Panoche Valley (Cypher et al. 2007). Acquisition of the Martin property would contribute to the Recovery Plan's recovery criteria by preserving core populations of SJKF, GKR, BNLL, SJWT, and other special status species present in the CPNA.

3.3 Cumulative Effects

According to CEQ regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA, a cumulative impact is defined as *the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions*. Cumulative effects can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time. The ongoing operation of the CVP has contributed to such cumulative effects, which Reclamation intends for the HRP and CVPCP to help address. The Proposed Action therefore helps reduce the impacts from those cumulative effects.

There are no adverse impacts associated with implementing the Proposed Action, and therefore there are no cumulative effects to consider.

Section 4 Consultation and Coordination

4.1 Persons or Agencies Consulted

- BLM Central Coast Field Office,
- BLM California State Office

4.2 Central Valley Project Conservation Program and CVPIA Habitat Restoration Program Technical Team

CVPCP and HRP managers are guided by a Technical Team of biologists and natural resource specialists from Reclamation, FWS, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The purpose of the Team is to implement a collaborative and integrated multi-agency process to coordinate actions under State and Federal laws to aid in recovery of CVP-impacted listed species. The Team helps insure the program is operated consistent with USFWS biological opinions (USFWS 2000) that guide implementation of the CVPCP/HRP to mitigate for past impacts to species from the CVP. The Team provides guidance and recommendations to CVPCP and HRP managers regarding the projects to be funded each year among those proposed. During the period of November 4, 2013 through February 20, 2014, members of the Technical Team reviewed and scored proposals submitted to Reclamation for consideration for funding. BLM's proposal to conserve lands in the Ciervo-Panoche area for the protection of listed species ranked in the top tier of proposals and was recommended for funding following evaluation by the Team. Reclamation and USFWS management subsequently approved the Technical Team's recommendation that the Proposed Action be funded.

Section 5 References

- Cypher, B., S.E. Phillips, and P.A. Kelly. 2007. Habitat suitability and potential corridors for San Joaquin kit fox in the San Luis Unit: Fresno, Kings and Merced Counties, California. Prepared for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, South-Central Area Office, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered Species Program. May 22, 2007. 34 p.
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management. 2007. Record of Decision for the Hollister Resource Management Plan for the Southern Diablo Mountain Range and Central Coast of California. U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington D.C.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1991. Formal Section 7 Consultation on an Interim Proposal to Authorize Livestock Grazing in Selected Allotments in the Hollister Resource Area. Sacramento, CA.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1998. Recovery plan for upland species of the San Joaquin Valley, California. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland, OR.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2000. Biological Opinion on Implementation of the CVPIA and Continued Operation and Maintenance of the CVP. Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office, Endangered Species Division. November 21, 2000.

Appendix A

Cultural Resources Compliance

CULTURAL RESOURCES COMPLIANCE
Division of Environmental Affairs
Cultural Resources Branch (MP-153)

MP-153 Tracking Number: 18-SCAO-033

Project Name: Eastern Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area Habitat Protection Project (Martin Property)

NEPA Document: EA

NEPA Contact: Dan Strait and Melanie Lowe

MP-153 Cultural Resources Reviewer: BranDee Bruce, Architectural Historian

Date: November 21, 2017

Reclamation proposes to enter into an interagency agreement to partially fund the purchase of property with two other Federal agencies, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), for an 1,387.12 acre parcel of land approximately 11 miles west of the intersection Interstate 5 and State Route 33 in Fresno County. The three federal agencies will jointly fund the land acquisition, but BLM will own and manage the property once purchased. No change in land use will occur, and no on-the-ground actions will result from this action. Reclamation funds will only be used to facilitate a transfer of title from the current owners to BLM. For any future actions proposed on the parcel, it will be the responsibility of BLM to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

Reclamation has determined entering into the interagency agreement and providing partial funds for this proposed land acquisition is the type of activity that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.3(a)(1). As such, Reclamation has no further obligations under Title 54 U.S.C. § 306108, commonly known as Section 106 of the NHPA. The proposed action will not have significant impacts on properties listed or eligible for listing in the in the National Register of Historic Places.

This document conveys the completion of the cultural resources review and Section 106 process for this undertaking. Please retain a copy with the administrative record for this action. Should the proposed action change, additional review under Section 106, possibly including consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer, may be required.

Appendix B

Indian Trust Assets Compliance

Indian Trust Assets Request Form

**Please send your request to: Kevin Clancy

Date: 11/20/17

Requested by	Melanie Lowe, x 5118
Fund	18XR0680A3
WBS	RX.30424993.0250000
Cost Center	RR2015200
Region # (if other than MP)	(NA)
Project Name	Eastern Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area Habitat Protection Project
CEC or EA Number	

Project Description	Reclamation would purchase 1,387.12 acres of the Martin Property within BLM's Eastern Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area. This purchase supports conservation efforts for federally endangered San Joaquin Valley upland species whose populations have been impacted by Central Valley Project operations.
*Project Location (Township, Range, Section, e.g., T12 R5E S10, or XY cords)	The Martin Property is located within the eastern portion of BLM's Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area (CPNA) in western Fresno County, California. (Figure 1)

*Please include map with request, if available.

ITA Determination:

The closest ITA to the Eastern Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area Habitat Protection Project is public land allotment (a parcel of land or real estate holding that may or may not be affiliated with a particular tribe or is in the process of being recorded) which is approximately 34 miles to the east. (See attached image).

Based on the nature of the planned work it does not appear be in an area that will impact Indian hunting or fishing resources or water rights nor is the proposed activity on actual Indian lands. It is reasonable to assume that the proposed action will not have any impacts on ITAs.

<i>K. Clancy</i>	Kevin Clancy	11/28/2017
_____	_____	_____
Signature	Printed name of approver	Date

Figure 1. Martin Property

