

SUMMARY - IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE HABITAT AREAS WITHIN RAMIREZ CANYON (5900 RAMIREZ CANYON ROAD AND 5801 DEBUTTS TERRACE), MALIBU, CALIFORNIA

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Definition of Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas

The City of Malibu's Local Coastal Program Land Use Plan (LUP) (City of Malibu 2002), states that "any area in which plant or animal life or their habitats are either rare or especially valuable because of their special nature or role in an ecosystem and which could be easily disturbed or degraded by human activities and developments are Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHA) (Section 30107.5 of the Coastal Act)."

Section 30240 of the Coastal Act (City of Malibu 2002) requires "the protection of ESHA against any significant disruption of habitat values. This policy further requires that development adjacent to ESHA is sited and designed to prevent impacts that would significantly degrade ESHA and to be compatible with the continuance of the habitat areas...."

Chapter 3, Section 2 (Land Use Plan Provisions) of the LUP (City of Malibu 2002) (page 41 paragraph 1) states that "the LUP policies establish the protection of areas adjacent to ESHA and adjacent to parklands through the provision of buffers. Natural vegetation buffer areas must be provided around ESHA or parkland that are of sufficient size to prevent impacts that would significantly degrade these areas. Development, *including fuel modification*, shall not be permitted within required buffer areas...."

Chapter 3, Section 2 of the LUP (City of Malibu 2002) (page 40) also states that "the LUP policies establish that the presence of ESHA not already designated on the ESHA map shall be determined on the basis of site-specific study prior to the approval of any development. Such determinations shall be reviewed by the City's Environmental Review Board. Habitat area found to meet the definition of ESHA shall be accorded all protection provided for ESHA by the LUP. ESHA shall be protected against significant disruption of habitat values and only resource dependent uses may be permitted within ESHA."

Fuel Modification Requirements

Per Section 1117.2.3 of the County of Los Angeles 1996 Fire Code, if the chief or commissioner finds that because of the location of any structure a 30-foot firebreak, as required by Section 1117.2.2, is not sufficient, all flammable vegetation must be cleared for a distance of greater than 30 feet, but not to exceed 200 feet. (Los Angeles County Fire Department 1998.)

The size and type of the fuel modification zone(s) will be determined by the Fire Department upon review of a preliminary fuel modification plan. Fuel modification distances are designed for typical fire weather scenarios and are not intended to be a blanket requirement for all fuel modification plans. The Fire Code also includes fuel modification recommendations based on site history and topography. Based on a cursory study of the Fire Code's Exhibit B (Estimated Fuel Modification Distance Chart), DMEC suggests that the site would require between a 150 to 200 foot fuel modification zone; however, specific fuel modification requirements is determined on a case by case basis. (<http://www.lacofd.org/Forestry/FuelModificationPlan.asp>.)

Habitat Descriptions

Portions of Coastal Sage Scrub qualifying as ESHA occur within the two properties in the Ramirez Canyon project site, as defined and mapped by the City of Malibu's Local Coastal Program LUP (adopted by the California Coastal Commission [CCC] on 13 September 2002). The habitats observed, classified, and mapped by DMEC during the field survey include the following:

- Herbaceous
 - *Nassella lepida* Alliance
 - Ruderal Grassland
- Coastal Sage Scrub
 - ESHA Riparian (ephemeral drainage dominated by Coastal Sage Scrub plant species)
 - *Artemisia californica* Alliance
 - *Baccharis pilularis* Alliance
 - *Eriogonum cinereum* Alliance
 - *Salvia leucophylla* Alliance
 - *Malosma laurina* Alliance
- Woodland
 - *Juglans californica* Alliance

Recent Changes to ESHA Onsite

As of DMEC's field surveys of 31 August 2006 and 14 September 2006, the Ramirez Canyon project site includes nine plant alliances (communities) that make up the landscape onsite. Of the nine plant alliances, eight qualify as ESHA per the City of Malibu's Local Coastal Program (ESHA Overlay Map 2), and one is disturbed Ruderal Grassland. The eight plant alliances that collectively qualify as ESHA existing on the 5900 and 5801 properties and in the surrounding areas of the Ramirez Canyon project site include: *Juglans californica* Alliance, ESHA Riparian (ephemeral drainage dominated by scrub), *Artemisia californica* Alliance, *Baccharis pilularis* Alliance, *Eriogonum cinereum* Alliance, *Salvia leucophylla* Alliance, and *Malosma laurina* Alliance and *Nassella lepida* Alliance.

The extent of these plant communities making up the Coastal Sage Scrub onsite, that qualify as ESHA, are continually changing as a result of natural and human disturbances. It is important to show the change in the extent of the plant communities qualifying as ESHA to determine the cumulative extent of past and potential impacts to sensitive habitats.



Table 4. Area of Habitats Qualifying as ESHA at the 5900 and 5801 Parcels for 1996, 2002, and 2006

Year	Extent of Natural Vegetation		
	5900	5801	Total
1996	2.0	10.3	12.3
2002 (published ESHA-CCC)	2.0	11.3	13.3
2006	1.4	6.2	7.6

Table 5. Loss Over Time of Habitats Qualifying as ESHA at the 5900 and 5801 Parcels

Loss of Habitats Qualifying as ESHA	At 5900 Ramirez Canyon Road	At 5801 DeButts Terrace	Total
Between 1996 and 2002 (Published ESHA)	0.06 acres	-1.07 acres (mapping inconsistencies due to CCC's inclusion of road areas)	-1.01 acres
Between 2002 (Published ESHA) and 2006	0.53 acres	5.18 acres	5.71 acres
Cumulative (Between 1996 and 2006)	0.59 acres	4.11 acres	4.70 acres

Direct Impacts to ESHA and Sensitive Habitats

Eight plant alliances at the Ramirez Canyon project site qualify as ESHA by the City of Malibu's Local Coastal Program (ESHA Overlay Map 2). Damage or loss of any natural, native vegetation, especially ESHA or sensitive habitat, ultimately contributes to the degradation of a region's structural diversity, species richness, and ecological integrity.

Section 30240 of the Coastal Act requires the protection of ESHA against any significant disruption of habitat values. It further requires that development adjacent to ESHA is designed to prevent impacts that would significantly degrade ESHA and is compatible with the continuance of the habitat areas. The LUP policies establish the protection of areas adjacent to ESHA and adjacent to parklands through the provision of buffers. Natural vegetation buffer areas must be provided around ESHA that are of sufficient size to prevent impacts that would significantly degrade these areas. Development, including fuel modification, shall not be permitted within required buffer areas. (City of Malibu 2002.)



Impacts to 5900 Ramirez Canyon Road Habitats

Since Section 30240 of the Coastal Act requires the protection of ESHA against any significant disruption of habitat values (City of Malibu 2002), impacts to 3.23 acres of habitat qualifying as ESHA on the 5900 parcel, based on the 2002 CCC mapped ESHA as published by the City of Malibu (2002), would be a significant impact. In addition, impacts to 1.82 acres of habitat qualifying as ESHA on the 5900 parcel, based on the current extent delineated in 2006 by DMEC, would also be a significant impact.

Table 6. Impacted Area of ESHA within 5900 Ramirez Canyon Road

Impacts to Habitats Qualifying as ESHA due to Required 200' Fuel Modification Zone	Within Property Boundaries of 5900 Ramirez Canyon Road	Potentially Impacted Areas Outside of Subject Properties (w/in 200' of structures)	Total Habitat Qualifying as ESHA Impacted
Impacts to ESHA Boundary (CCC, published by City of Malibu, 2002)	1.31 acres	1.94 acres	3.25 acres
Impacts to Current Extent of Habitat (2006) Qualifying as ESHA	0.83 acres	0.99 acres	1.82 acres

Impacts to 5801 De Butts Terrace Habitats

Since Section 30240 of the Coastal Act requires the protection of ESHA against any significant disruption of habitat values (City of Malibu 2002), impacts to 2.62 acres of habitat qualifying as ESHA on the 5801 parcel, based on the 2002 CCC mapped ESHA as published by the City of Malibu (2002), would be a significant impact. In addition, impacts to 1.77 acres of habitat qualifying as ESHA on the 5801 parcel, based on the current extent delineated in 2006 by DMEC, would also be a significant impact.

Table 7. Impacted Area of ESHA within 5801 De Butts Terrace

Impacts to Habitats Qualifying as ESHA due to Required 200' Fuel Modification Zone	Within Property Boundaries of 5801 DeButts Terrace¹	Potentially Impacted Areas Outside of Subject Properties (w/in 200' of structures)	Total Habitat Qualifying as ESHA Impacted
Impacts to ESHA Boundary (CCC, published by City of Malibu, 2002)	2.45 acres	0.17 acres	2.62 acres
Impacts to Current Extent of Habitat (2006) Qualifying as ESHA	1.59 acres	0.18 acres	1.77 acres

¹ These figures include only vegetation that would be cleared due to the development of a structure at 5801 DeButts Terrace, and do not include fuel modification due to the development of a structure at 5900 Ramirez Canyon Road.



Impacts to the Ramirez Canyon Project Area

Since Section 30240 of the Coastal Act requires the protection of ESHA against any significant disruption of habitat values (City of Malibu 2002), the cumulative loss of 5.87 acres (as published by City of Malibu 2002), or 3.58 acres (as delineated in 2006) of Coastal Sage Scrub and other related habitats that qualify as ESHA resulting from fuel modification at the Ramirez Canyon project site would be a significant impact.

Table 8. Collective Impacted Area of ESHA at the Ramirez Canyon Project Site (including both 5900 and 5801 properties)

Impacts to Habitats Qualifying as ESHA due to Required 200' Fuel Modification Zone	Within Property Boundaries of 5900 Ramirez Canyon Road	Within Property Boundaries of 5801 DeButts Terrace	Total within Subject Properties	Potentially Impacted Areas Outside of Subject Properties (w/in 200' of structures)	Total Habitat Qualifying as ESHA Impacted
Impacts to ESHA Boundary (CCC, published by City of Malibu, 2002)	1.31 acres	2.65 acres ²	3.96 acres	1.91 acres	5.87 acres
Impacts to Current Extent of Habitat (2006) Qualifying as ESHA	0.83 acres	1.79 acres ³	2.61 acres	0.97 acres	3.58 acres

Potential Impacts to Special-Status Species

Twenty-nine (29) **special-status plant species** are tracked by CNDDDB within the vicinity of the Ramirez Canyon project site. No special-status plant species were observed directly within either parcel; however, two of the 29 tracked special-status plant species were observed within the Ramirez Canyon project area immediately outside of the parcels, including *Juglans californica* var. *californica* and *Baccharis plummerae* ssp. *plummerae*. Although these species were not observed immediately with the parcels, vegetation clearing required for fuel modification will impact both species, which would be a significant impact.

Another four (4) of the 29 special-status plant species tracked by CNDDDB are *likely* to occur onsite since they have habitat requirements similar to the habitats of the Ramirez Canyon project site (primarily Coastal Sage Scrub), including *Astragalus brauntonii*, *Atriplex coulteri*, *Calochortus clavatus* var. *gracilis*, and *Calochortus plummerae*. While none of these plant species were observed during field surveys, loss of individuals of these species as a result of construction or vegetation clearing would be a significant impact. In addition, the proposed projects would result in the

² This figure includes not only vegetation that would be cleared due to the development of a structure at 5801 DeButts Terrace, but also vegetation that would be cleared in the far southwest corner of the property that would be cleared due to development of a structure at 5900 Ramirez Canyon Rd.

³ Idib. (Footnote 4).

cumulative loss of 5.87 acres (as published by City of Malibu 2002), or 3.58 acres (as delineated in 2006), of potentially occupied Coastal Sage Scrub that qualifies as ESHA, as well as other plant alliances qualifying as ESHA, resulting from fuel modification, which would be a significant impact.

No **special-status wildlife species** were observed onsite; however, of the 36 special-status wildlife species tracked by CNDDDB, five (5) have habitat requirements similar to the habitats of the Ramirez Canyon project site (Coastal Sage Scrub). The five species likely to occur onsite, based on suitable habitat requirements, include Southern California Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Coastal Western Whiptail, San Diego Desert Woodrat, Coast (San Diego) Horned Lizard, and Coast (California) Horned Lizard. While none of these wildlife species were observed during field surveys, loss of individuals of these species as a result of construction or vegetation clearing would be a significant impact. In addition, the proposed projects would result in the cumulative loss of 5.87 acres (as published by City of Malibu 2002), or 3.58 acres (as delineated in 2006), of potentially occupied Coastal Sage Scrub that qualifies as ESHA, as well as other plant alliances qualifying as ESHA, resulting from fuel modification, which would be a significant impact.

Indirect Impacts to Wildlife Movement

The Santa Monica Mountains offer an example of how fragmentation threatens wildlife and how greenways can alleviate the problem by acting as conduits. The Santa Monica Mountains lie at the southern tip of a mountain range which spreads northward through the Simi Hills to the Santa Susana Mountains and finally into the vast mountain ranges of Los Padres and Angeles National Forests. The mountains originally harbored an uninterrupted band of mountainous habitat. Westward expansion, however, has created two significant divisions where freeways cut across the ranges -- the Simi Valley Freeway (Route 118) and the Ventura Freeway (Route 101). These highways have effectively isolated the Santa Monicas and the Simi Hills from the Santa Susana Mountains and the two National Forests. The mountain range supports a wide diversity of wildlife species. Although large areas of mountain habitat remain in the Santa Monicas and Simi Hills, the remnant patches are probably too small to sustain some wildlife populations. For example, it is estimated that only eight Mountain Lions exist in the Santa Monica Mountains. A population this small is likely to succumb to the isolation effects. Bobcat, Grey Fox, and Badgers, while not currently in such low numbers, may also disappear from the Santa Monica Mountains. Preventing the loss of those and other wildlife species will depend upon overcoming the effects of fragmentation and allowing the now-divided mountain range to function as a whole. (<http://www.qlf.org/greenways/smonica.html>.)

The plant alliances existing within the Ramirez Canyon Project Site, which qualify as ESHA, form a large patch of Coastal Sage Scrub between and within the 5900 and 5801 parcels. This Coastal Sage Scrub exists within a small canyon separating the two proposed development envelopes and includes an ephemeral drainage at the bottom of the canyon. The small canyon runs in a south-northerly direction and is predominantly (at least currently) undeveloped from the Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) north to the proposed projects. Although residences and other disturbances line the ridgelines at the top of the small canyon, all the way from the PCH to the proposed projects, the canyon vegetation itself is largely undisturbed and of high quality. The small canyon ends just north of the two parcels (5900 and 5801) where the two west and east ridgelines of the small canyon merge forming one continuous ridgeline far to the north, deep within the Santa Monica Mountains. Therefore, the small canyon existing between the two proposed projects creates one of few access routes in the area to the Pacific Ocean to the south, and continues north providing access to and from the larger Santa Monica Mountains area. In addition, DMEC observed several wildlife travel routes immediately within the



small canyon between the two development envelopes of 5900 and 5801 with recent Mule Deer and Coyote tracks and scat. It is evident that this small canyon is of functional and high quality habitat for wildlife species, and that local wildlife use this canyon heavily to access its cover, forage, and breeding resources, as well as for the seasonal water resources the ephemeral drainage at the bottom provides. Water was present in the drainage at the timing of DMEC's late summer survey.

A cumulative loss of 5.87 acres (as published by City of Malibu 2002), or 3.58 acres (as delineated in 2006), of Coastal Sage Scrub qualifying as ESHA will be impacted within the Ramirez Canyon project site. Since the City of Malibu LUP protects habitats qualifying as ESHA that are of high quality for wildlife, fuel modification that would be required for the proposed developments at 5900 and 5801 would clear critical habitat required for wildlife usage and travel, and would be a significant impact.

Indirect Impacts of Invasive Plant Species on ESHA Habitats

Seeds or propagules from invasive species may escape to natural areas and degrade the native vegetation and sensitive plant communities. Introduced plant species readily invade and colonized disturbed areas. DMEC observed several invasive plant species within the ruderal areas of the project site, resulting from vegetation clearing and grading, including *Centaurea melitensis* (Tocalote), *Chrysanthemum coronarium* (Garland Chrysanthemum), *Cynodon dactylon* (Bermuda Grass), *Euphorbia peplus* (Petty Spurge), *Hordeum vulgare* (Cultivated Barley), *Lactuca serriola* (Prickly Wild Lettuce), *Marrubium vulgare* (White Horehound), *Picris echioides* (Bristly Ox-tongue), and *Salsola tragus* (Tumbleweed). These species create highly competitive conditions and generally out-compete the more desirable natives for resources. These species are highly likely to invade adjacent ESHA vegetation within the project site if natural buffers are not established. The proposed projects will also likely include landscaping adjacent to the natural vegetation qualifying as ESHA. The landscaping may include ornamental species that are known to be particularly invasive. Subsequent homeowners may also plant invasive plant species in their yards. These impacts are considered adverse and potentially significant considering the extent of Coastal Sage Scrub habitat qualifying as ESHA that exists on the project site.