

## MORRO SHOULDERBAND SNAIL HABITAT ASSESSMENT REPORT For 460 Los Osos Valley Road



MORRO  
GROUP, INC.  
Environmental Services

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### INTRODUCTION

This special-status species habitat assessment report has been prepared by Morro Group, Inc. at the request of Mr. Dan Smith, and is intended for use by the County of San Luis Obispo and regulatory agencies for permitting and planning purposes. The objective of this report is to provide a habitat assessment for the Morro shoulderband snail (*Helminthoglypta walkeriana*), and to determine the presence or absence of special-status plants on an approximately 0.25-acre vacant lot located at 460 Los Osos Valley Road in Los Osos, CA (refer to Figure 1). The data presented in this report is a compilation of information received from regulatory agencies, literature reviews, and an on-site investigation of the property by Morro Group personnel.

### ASSESSMENT METHODS

The assessment was conducted on September 24, 2002, by Bob Sloan of Morro Group, Inc. Mr. Sloan is federally authorized under Permit PRT-824123 to conduct surveys and habitat assessments for the Morro shoulderband snail (MSS). The assessment began at 8 A.M., and continued for approximately 1 hour. United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) survey protocols for MSS require that formal surveys be performed under rainy/heavy fog conditions. Conditions during the assessment were very dry, and did not satisfy survey protocol weather requirements. The assessment was conducted on foot, and covered the entire property. All areas of the site were thoroughly examined in order to determine whether live MSS or empty shells, suitable habitat for MSS, or special status plant species were present on the property.

### SPECIAL-STATUS SPECIES AND HABITAT DESCRIPTION

Morro Shoulderband Snail - On December 15, 1994 the USFWS listed the Morro shoulderband snail as an endangered species. A member of the land snail family Helminthoglyptidae, Morro shoulderband snails are most closely related to the surf shoulderband snail (*Helminthoglypta fieldii*), which occurs in coastal dune habitats south of the San Luis range to Point Arguello. The geographic limits of the species have been generally considered to coincide with the limits of stabilized, vegetated, dune habitats located east, southeast, and south of Morro Bay (Roth, 1985), however recent sightings in north Morro Bay and the Chorro Valley have occurred on clay substrates. Recent discoveries of MSS in non-coastal areas east of Morro Bay (Camp San Luis and California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo) have recharacterized the original habitat and range of MSS. Morro shoulderband snail has been found to be closely associated with several species of shrubs including mock heather, black sage, coyote brush, and with the introduced hottentot fig (ice plant). Typically, shrubs where live MSS have been found exhibit dense, low growth with ample contact with the ground.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

The lot is bordered to the west and north by existing residences, to the east by a mowed grass field, and to the north by Los Osos Valley Road (refer to Figure 2 and attached photographs). The lot is level, and is dominated by introduced plant species, including veldt grass (*Ehrharta calycina*), ice plant, (*Carpobrotus edulis*), and several large ornamental trees.

Native coastal sage scrub species present on the property include California croton (*Croton californicus*), and California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) scattered through the veldt grass, and several small coyote bush (*Baccharis pilularis*), along the driveway.

## RESULTS

One live adult MSS and three Class B (6 months to 2 years old) empty shells were found during the assessment. The live specimen and shells were found in association with ice plant (refer to Figure 2). Numerous live common garden snails (*Helix aspersa*), and empty shells were also observed on the site.

No special-status plant species were observed on the property during the assessment.

## REGULATORY IMPLICATIONS

The findings as described above are sufficient to establish the presence of MSS within the surveyed property. Any development of the property therefore has potential to result in "take" of Morro shoulderband snail. Section 3(18) of the Endangered Species Act defines "take" to mean "to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct." As defined by the USFWS, "harm" includes significant habitat modification or degradation which actually kills or injures wildlife by "significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, which include, but are not limited to, breeding, feeding, or sheltering". Habitat modification or degradation in this instance could include grubbing, grading, or other activities that impact vegetation present on the property.

Although the property is not included in the current building moratorium area, no construction is possible until MSS mitigation procedures are established through the community-wide Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) currently under preparation by the Los Osos Community Services District (LOCSO), in conjunction with the USFWS. The community-wide HCP will establish mitigation ratios and costs for impacts to MSS habitat resulting from residential and commercial development, based on the square footage of habitat impacted by the project. Mitigation ratios and associated costs under the community HCP have not yet been determined.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that any future site development should proceed through participation in the community-wide HCP, after the building moratorium is lifted.

Since MSS presence has been identified on the site, annual weed abatement activities required by the County Fire Department should follow the guidelines established by the USFWS. These guidelines are included in the annual weed abatement notice sent to all Los Osos property owners.

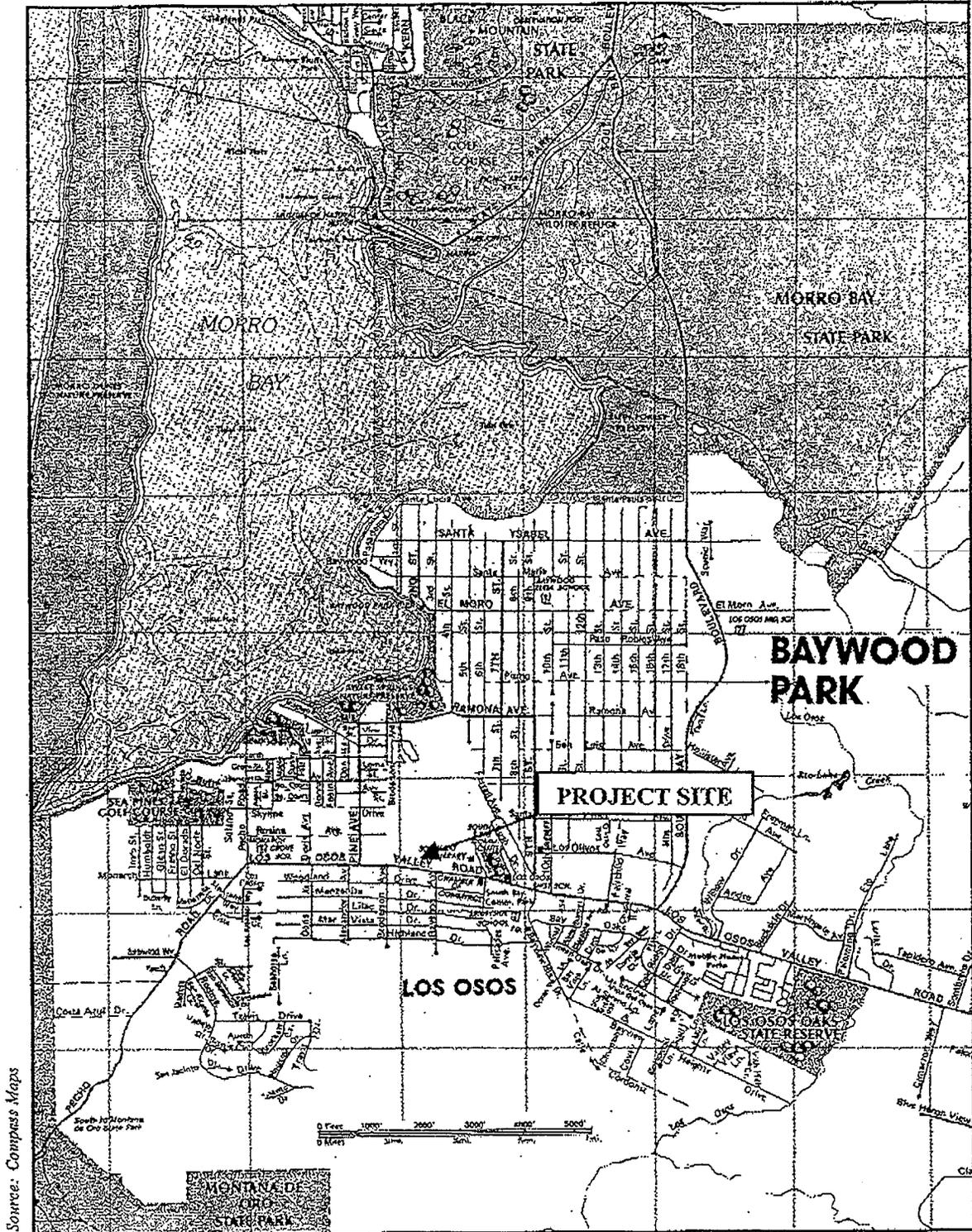
## AGENCY CONTACTS

The USFWS biologist responsible for Morro shoulderband snail issues is Ms. Della Snyder. She can be contacted at USFWS Ventura Field Office, 2493 Portola Road, Suite B, Ventura CA 93003, or by e-mail at Della\_Snyder@r1.fws.gov. The Ventura Field Office phone number is (805) 644-1766, and the fax number is (805) 644-3958.

The Los Osos Community Services District (LOCSD) is responsible for preparation of the community-wide HCP. Their office is located at 2122 9<sup>th</sup> Street in Los Osos. The telephone number is (805) 528-9370, and the fax number is (805) 528-9377.

**REFERENCES**

- California Natural Diversity Data Base. 2002. Data Base Search for the Morro Bay South U.S.G.S. 7.5-minute Quadrangle. California Department of Fish and Game. Sacramento, California.
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- Holland, Robert F. 1986. *Preliminary Descriptions of the Terrestrial Natural Communities of California*. California Department of Fish and Game. Sacramento, California.
- Hoover, Robert F. 1970. *The Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County, California*. University of California Press. Berkeley, California.
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- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1998. *Recovery Plan for the Morro Shoulderband Snail and Four Plants from Western San Luis Obispo County, California*. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland, Oregon.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1997. *Interim Survey Guidelines for the Morro Shoulderband Snail*. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland, Oregon.



Source: Compass Maps

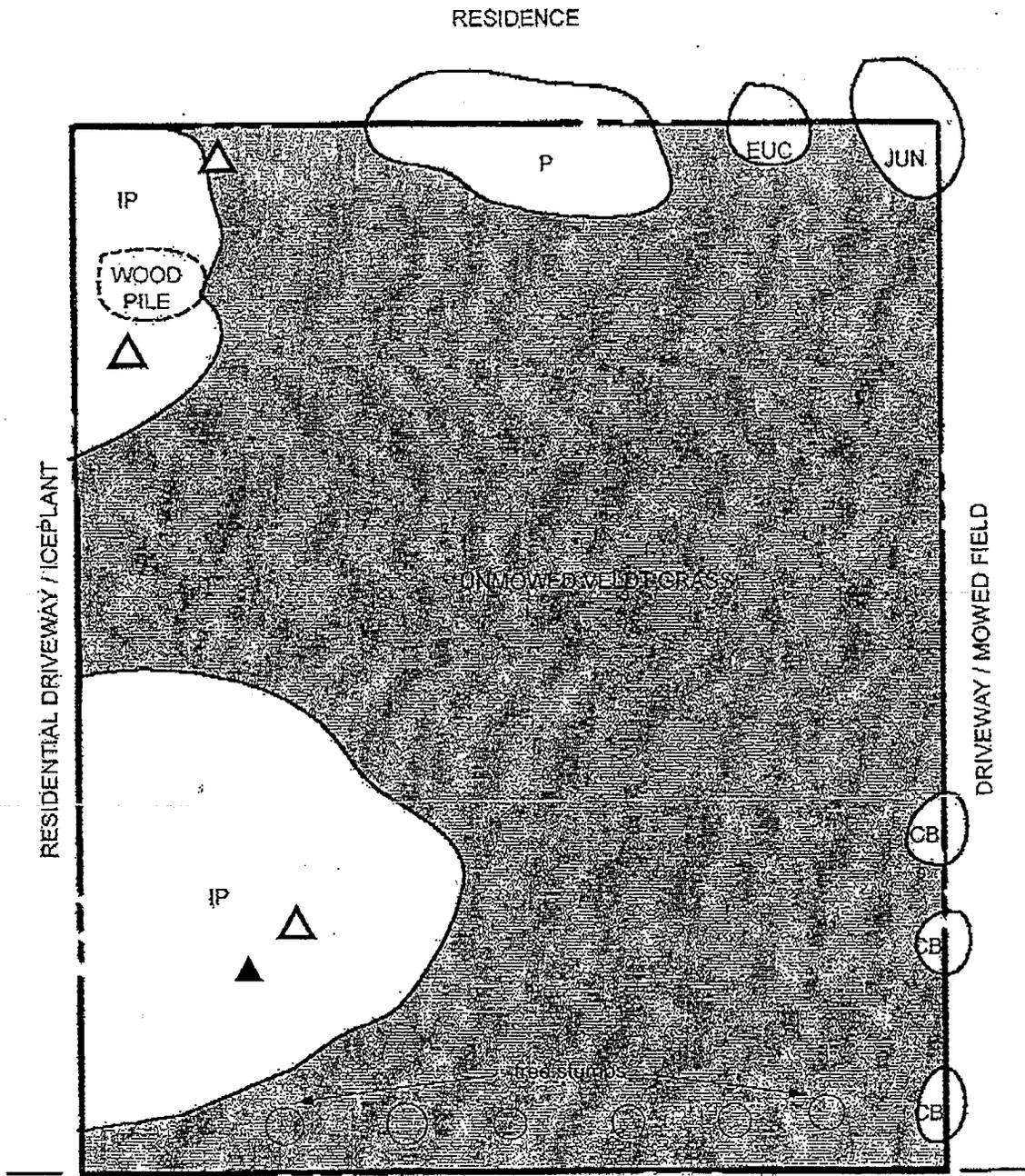


NORTH  
Not to Scale

VICINITY MAP  
FIGURE 1

460 Los Osos Valley Road

Morro Shoulderband Snail Habitat Assessment



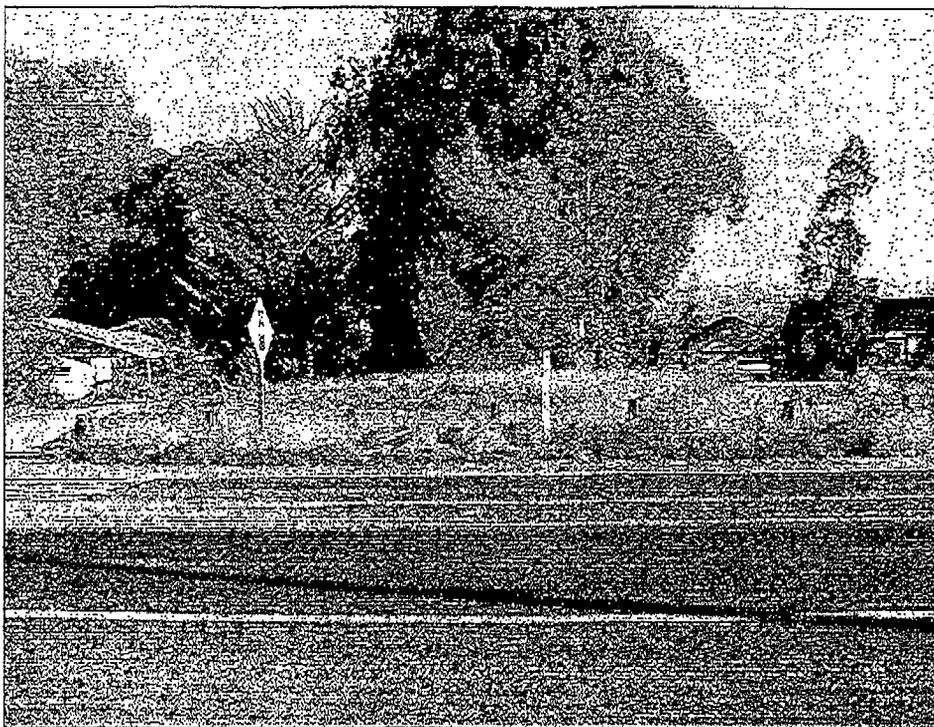
LOS OSOS VALLEY ROAD



SOUTH  
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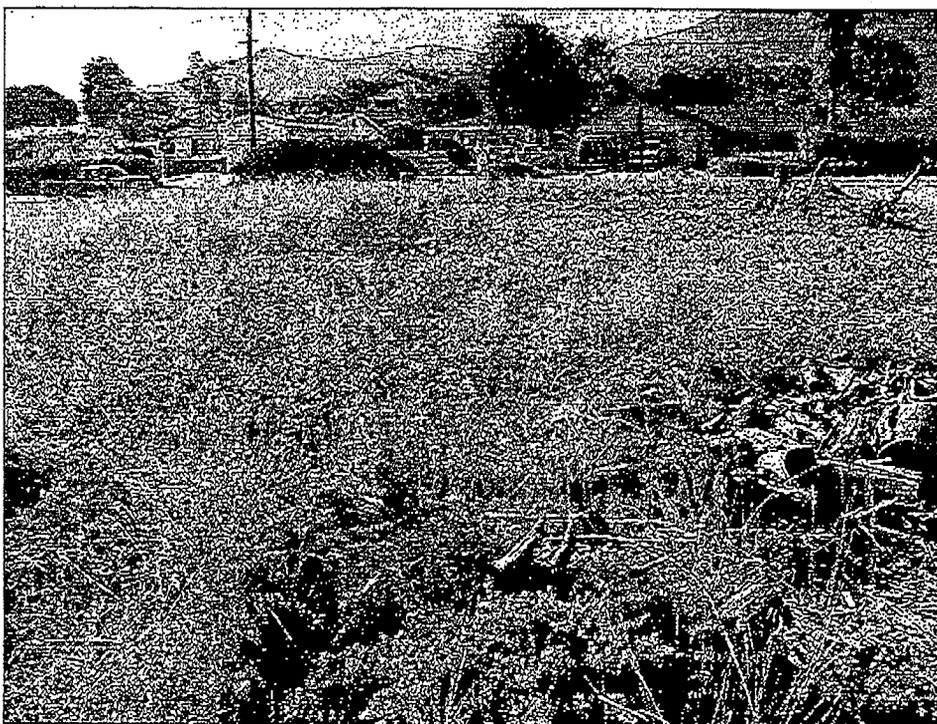
- ▲ Live MSS
- △ Empty MSS shell
- CB Coyote Brush
- IP Ice Plant
- EUC Eucalyptus
- JUN Juniper
- P Pine

SITE PLAN  
FIGURE 2



**Photo 1:**

View of lot looking north from Los Osos Valley Road. Note veldt grass and ice plant cover, and tree stumps along front of lot.



**Photo 2:**

View from back of lot looking toward Los Osos Valley Road. Note ice plant and woodpile in foreground.

**PHOTO DOCUMENTATION**