APPENDIX E

FIELD VISITS AND VERIFICATION

Purpose and Scope of Field Visits

Field visits provided on-the-ground context for interpreting desktop analyses and evaluating potential SEA boundary adjustments. Field visits were conducted in all locations where boundary changes to unincorporated SEAs are recommended to document and photograph current site conditions and support review of proposed adjustments. These visits were used to assess areas with a limited amount of existing data or where certain site-specific conditions were not visible in remotely sensed data, as well as to confirm habitat conditions, intactness of ecological function, and landscape connectivity features, such as barriers to movement in locations where boundary changes were being considered based on desktop analysis.

Field visits were used to supplement desktop-derived findings with site-specific observations, with particular attention given to areas meeting the newly proposed SEA Selection Criterion related to landscape and habitat connectivity, which was not evaluated in the 2000 SEA Study. As a result, field review focused not only on intact habitat areas, but also on degraded, constrained, or transitional landscapes that may nonetheless serve important functional roles in facilitating wildlife movement, such as narrow linkage zones, washes, culverts, underpasses, and other movement features.

Field Visit Objectives

The primary objectives of the field visits were to:

- Confirm habitat conditions, landscape context, and ecological features not fully discernible through aerial imagery or spatial datasets.
- Evaluate areas outside existing SEA boundaries that may warrant inclusion, particularly in light of the newly proposed SEA connectivity criterion.
- Identify potential constraints, disturbances, or barriers affecting ecological function and wildlife movement.
- Provide professional judgment to inform SEA boundary evaluation, refinement, and recommendations.

Field Visit Approach and Protocols

To ensure consistency and defensibility, the project team established the following protocols prior to initiating field visits:

- **Minimum coverage:** At least one field visit was conducted or planned for each area where a boundary adjustment or inclusion was under consideration.
- **Access constraints:** All visits were conducted from public rights-of-way unless prior landowner permission was obtained.
- **Documentation:** Observations were recorded using a combination of standardized digital field forms, field notes, and photographs to support subsequent evaluation.

Field observations were recorded using a standardized Google Form to promote consistency in data capture across observers and sites. Recorded information included general site context, qualitative habitat observations, evidence of ecological function or constraints, and photographic documentation.

All field visits were conducted by the project's senior biologists, Dan Cooper and Robb Hamilton, with participation by the County's Senior Biologist (Joe Decruyenaere) when available, to ensure consistency in interpretation and application of professional judgment informed by extensive regional experience.

Preparation and Use of Field Mapping Tools

To support efficient and data-informed field verification, the project team developed a mobile field mapping application using ArcGIS Field Maps. The application served as a navigation and reference tool, allowing real-time visualization of field locations relative to key ecological datasets used in the SEA Study desktop analysis.

Most datasets informing the desktop analysis were loaded into the application prior to field visits, enabling evaluation of site conditions in context and dynamic refinement of field routes. While the application performs best with an active internet connection, map layers remained visible in areas with limited or no service.

Datasets displayed in the Field Maps application included representative layers such as:

- Special-status species records
- Rare and uncommon plant species richness heatmap
- Wildlife connectivity datasets from multiple external sources

- California Aquatic Resources Inventory (CARI) wetlands
- Protected lands and conservation ownership
- Existing SEA boundaries and jurisdictional context layers

Additional datasets (e.g., land-cover change, wildfire-related layers, climate exposure indices) were used during pre-field planning to identify "high-interest" areas but were not displayed as standalone layers during field navigation due to map complexity.

Identification of Field Visit Areas

Prior to field visits, the project team conducted an initial desktop screening to identify broad areas where one or more SEA Selection Criteria appeared likely to be met based on available spatial data. For internal planning purposes, these areas were delineated as preliminary polygons. These polygons were exploratory in nature and were not intended to represent proposed SEA boundaries or recommendations.

Existing SEA boundaries were subsequently overlaid onto the preliminary polygons to identify locations where additional review outside current SEA extents might be warranted. Field visits were prioritized in these locations, particularly where questions related to habitat connectivity, landscape function, or ecological condition could not be resolved through desktop analysis alone.

Information gathered during field visits was used to confirm, refine, or dismiss preliminary observations and to inform professional judgment regarding the appropriateness of any potential boundary adjustments discussed later in this report.

Field Observations and Documentation

Field visits were conducted between November 2025 and February 2026. Field observations at a total of 181 locations were documented across multiple subregions of the study area (Table 1).

At each field visit location, the project team recorded standardized observations to document site conditions relevant to SEA Selection Criteria and boundary evaluation. Observations were recorded using a combination of standardized digital field forms, field notes, and photographic documentation.

The following information recorded at each location, as applicable:

- Date, time, and general weather conditions
- Observer(s) present

- Approximate location and access point
- Dominant habitat types and notable ecological features
- Qualitative impressions of habitat quality and condition
- Evidence of wildlife movement or barriers (e.g., fencing, culverts, roads, channelization)
- Observed species or sign (incidental), with emphasis on sensitive or indicator species
- Existing disturbances or impacts (e.g., development, invasive species, dumping)
- Representative photographs documenting habitat condition and landscape context

Photographic documentation was collected at field visit locations to provide visual context for habitat conditions and landscape setting, particularly in areas where SEA boundary adjustments are proposed. Photographs were taken opportunistically based on site access, visibility, and relevance to observed conditions, and are not intended to represent a complete or systematic photographic inventory.

Field observations were either entered directly into a standardized digital field form or were initially recorded in field notebooks and subsequently entered into the digital field forms. The compiled digital responses are maintained in the SEA Study Field Visit Data Sheet (Responses) excel file, which serves as the consolidated record of field observations.

Photographic documentation was collected at field visit locations to provide visual context for habitat conditions and landscape setting, particularly in areas where SEA boundary adjustments are proposed. Photographs were taken opportunistically based on site access, visibility, and relevance to observed conditions, and are not intended to represent a complete or systematic photographic inventory.

Table 1. Field visits to potential SEA habitats, Nov 2025 – Feb. 2026.
Observers: Daniel S. Cooper (DSC), Robert A. Hamilton (RAH), Joseph Decruyenaere (JD).

Date	*Participants*	*Subarea*	*# Survey Points*	*Route notes*
Nov. 24, 2025	DSC, RAH, JD	Santa Clarita	23	Started at Golden Valley Rd., drove the length of Bouquet Canyon Rd. northeast to Ranch Center Dr./edge of ANF, returned via Soledad Canyon Rd.
Dec. 12, 2025	DSC, RAH	Santa Clarita, western Antelope Valley	19	Started at base of San Francisquito Canyon Rd., drove northeast to Lake Elizabeth Rd., then west through western Antelope Valley to 210th St. W.

Dec. 16, 2025	DSC, RAH, JD	Eastern Antelope Valley	22	Started at 90th St. E. (at Ave. P), then continued to northeastern corner of county (vic. 260th St. E. at Ave. G). Headed south through Llano to Largo Vista Rd./Big Pines Hwy., returning via Mt. Emma Rd.
Dec. 23, 2025	DSC, RAH	Northwestern Antelope Valley	10	Started at Gorman Post Rd., worked east to 185th St. W, then west to end at Hungry Valley OHV area
Dec. 29, 2025	DSC	Vic. Llano (eastern Antelope Valley)	2	Quick check of areas missed on Dec. 16
Jan. 6, 2026	RAH	Palos Verdes Peninsula	18	Check of two Palos Verdes Blue sites (Defense Fuel Support Point, Chandler Preserve) and other potential SEAs and connectivity areas.
Jan. 7, 2026	RAH	Palos Verdes Peninsula	24	Check of Palos Verdes Blue site (Malaga Dunes) and other potential SEAs and connectivity areas.
Jan. 9, 2026	RAH	Walnut, Diamond Bar	18	Check of Galster Wilderness Park, Lemon Creek, hills along Amar Rd., Summitridge Park, Tres Hermanos Ranch.
Jan. 13, 2026	DSC	Santa Clara River to San Gabriel Mtns	10	
Jan. 13, 2026	RAH	Walnut, Schabarum Park	16	Check of Mt. SAC College, sites to the west, and Schabarum Park.
Jan. 15, 2026	RAH	Colorado Lagoon	1	Quick check to take photos of foraging birds.
Jan. 16, 2026	RAH	Walnut, Schabarum Park	1	Quick check to take photos of foraging birds.
Feb. 15, 2026	DSC	Eastern Antelope Valley	9	Check of areas not visited on prior dates.
Feb. 21, 2026	DSC	Western Antelope Valley	8	Check of areas not visited on prior dates.