

Staff Report 49

APPLICANT:

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

PROPOSED ACTION:

Issuance of a General Lease – Public Agency Use.

AREA, LAND TYPE, AND LOCATION:

Approximately 6,000 acres of State-owned school land, located on 87 parcels, distributed across the counties of Inyo, Kern, San Bernardino, and Riverside (as shown in Figures 1a and 1b).

Figure 1a. Location Map 1

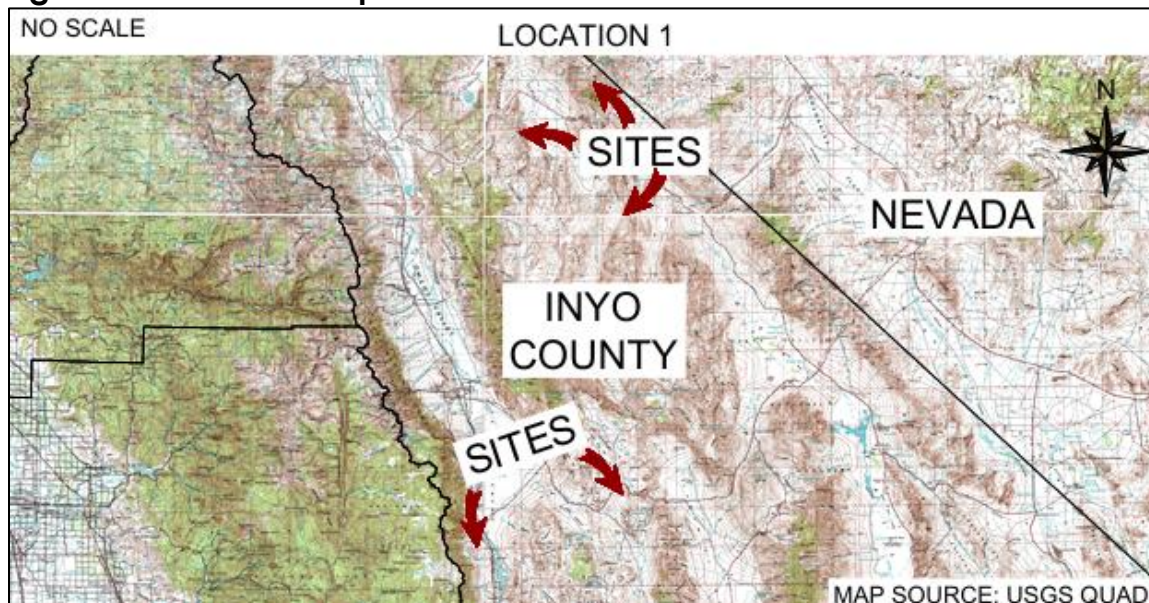
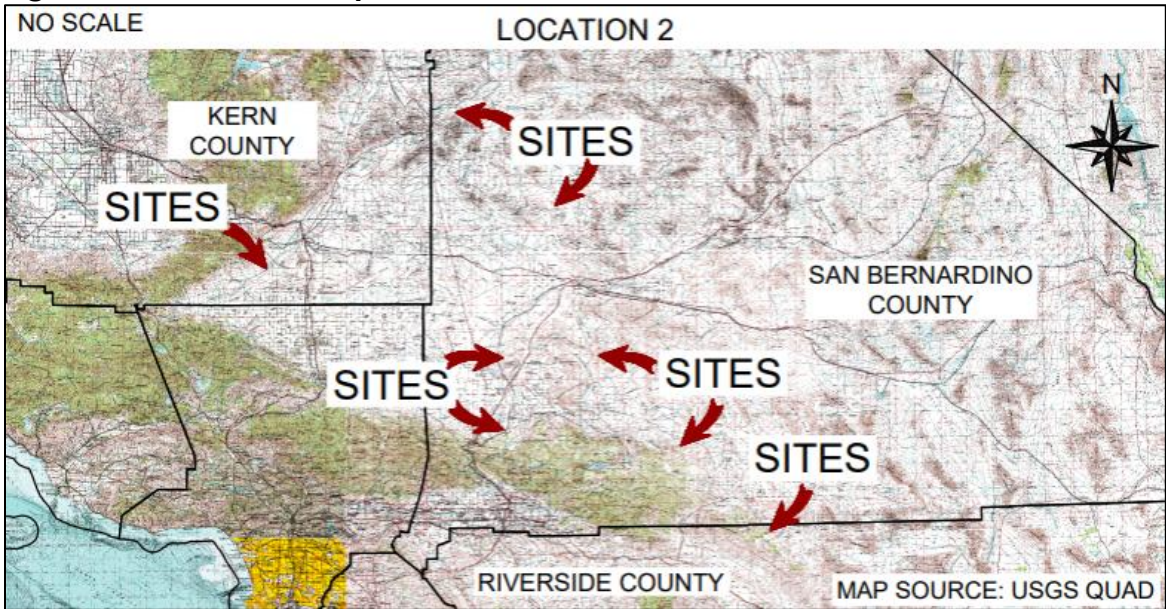


Figure 2b. Location Map 2



AUTHORIZED USE:

To collect Western Joshua Tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) seeds on State-owned School lands (as shown in Figures 2a and 2b).

Figure 2a. Site Map 1

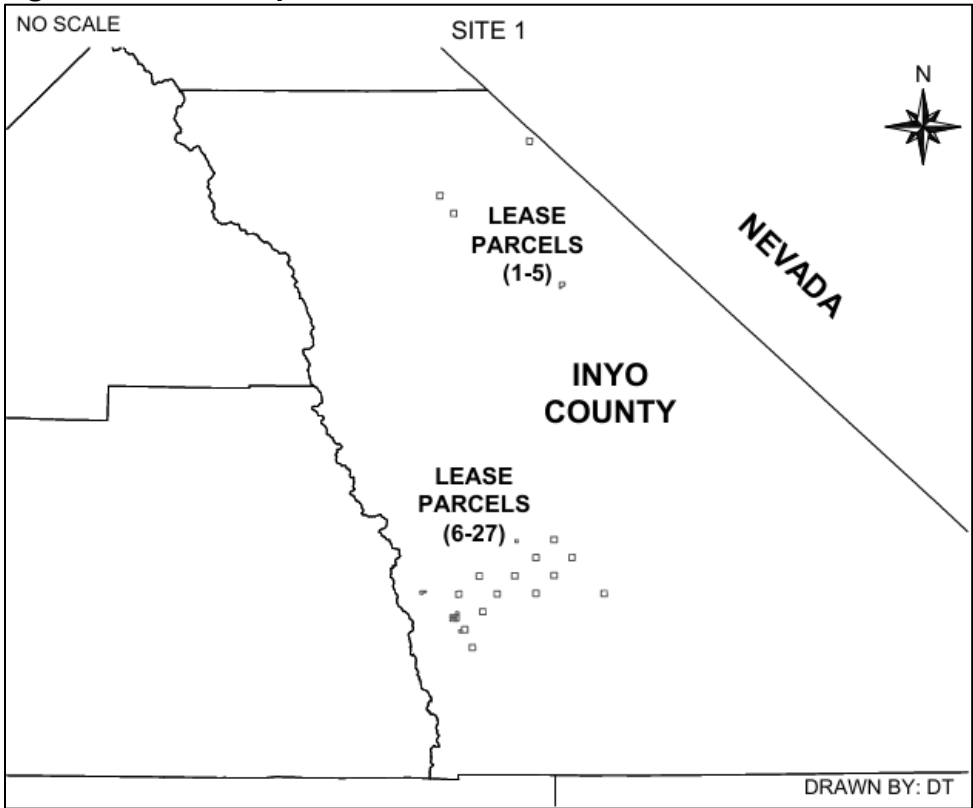
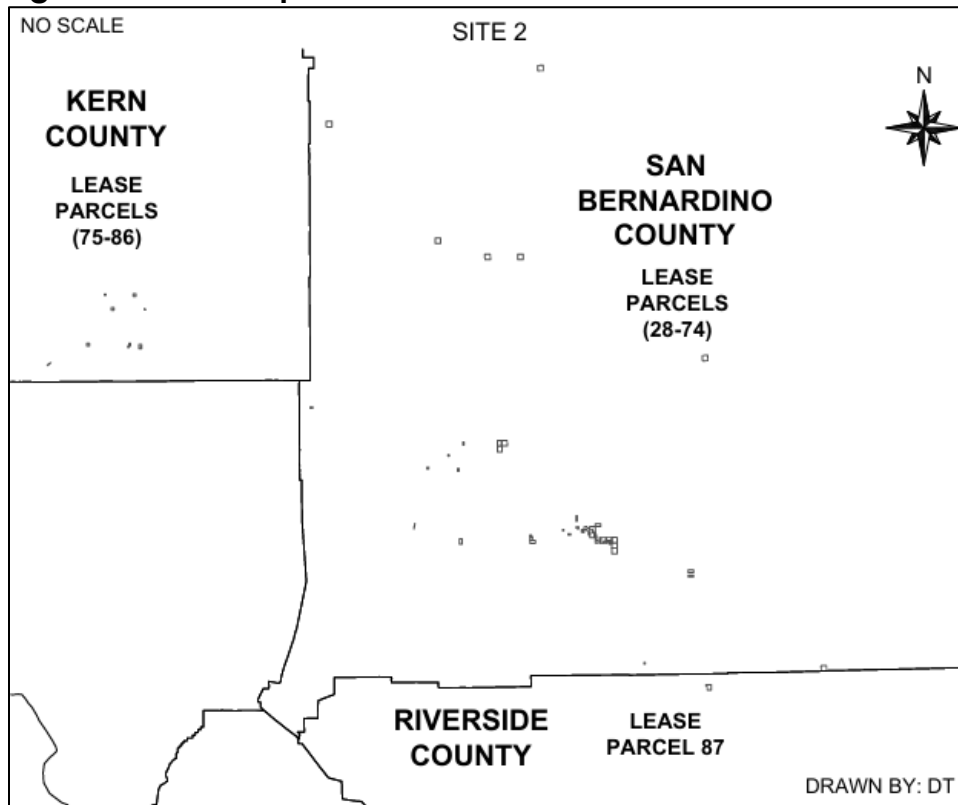


Figure 3b. Site Map 2



NOTE: This depiction of the lease premises is based on unverified information provided by the Applicant or other parties and is not a waiver or limitation of any State interest in the subject or any other property.

TERM:

7 years, beginning August 25, 2026.

CONSIDERATION:

Rent: \$167 per year.

SPECIFIC LEASE PROVISIONS:

- Lessee shall not add or allow any other party to add any improvements on the Lease Premises.
- Lessee may collect seeds by hand and conduct biological surveys.
- Lessee shall obtain and secure, prior to commencement of the assessments, all approvals necessary or appropriate permits from all other agencies or governmental entities having jurisdiction.

- Disturbance of the property under the Commission's jurisdiction shall be kept to a minimum area consistent with the nature and purpose of the proposed assessments.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION:

AUTHORITY:

Public Resources Code sections 6005, 6216, 6217.5, 6301, 6501.1, 6503, and 8701; California Code of Regulations, title 2, sections 2000 and 2003.

STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:

The Applicant is a State agency responsible for conserving California's fish, wildlife, native plants, and their habitats. The Applicant proposes to collect Western Joshua Tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) seeds on approximately 87 State-owned school land parcels totaling about 6,000 acres in Inyo, Kern, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties. The collected seeds will support scientific research, conservation, habitat restoration, and future recovery efforts for Western Joshua Tree populations.

Project activities include seasonal site reconnaissance and seed collection using hand tools and established botanical collection methods. Seed collections will follow the [Center for Plant Conservation's Best Practice Guidelines](#) and will be limited to no more than 10 percent of the annual seed production within each stand to promote natural regeneration. The proposed activities are temporary and involve minimal disturbance to State-owned school lands. No grading, construction, installation of improvements, or use of heavy equipment is proposed.

The proposed project is consistent with California's goals of conserving native plant species, protecting biodiversity, and enhancing ecosystem resilience. Authorizing this lease will facilitate responsible stewardship of State-owned school lands while supporting a State agency's conservation mission and advancing long-term natural resource management objectives. Prior to processing the lease application, on April 8, 2026, staff issued a letter of non-objection for the Applicant to collect Western Joshua Tree seeds on 82 parcels within State-owned school lands in Inyo, San Bernardino, Kern, Los Angeles, and Riverside Counties.

CLIMATE CHANGE:

INTRODUCTION:

Climate change is significantly altering California's deserts, the hottest and driest regions in the state. As the atmosphere warms, there are more extremely hot days and unpredictable rainfall. Longer droughts are expected, and precipitation patterns will change in timing and intensity, affecting plant growth and distribution. The desert is likely to see a corresponding increase in wildfires and flash flooding. These impacts may affect areas subject to the proposed seed collection activities on lease lands in Inyo, San Bernardino, Kern, and Riverside Counties.

DATA & PROJECTIONS:

In the desert areas of California, daily average high temperatures are projected to increase significantly by the end of the century ([Inland Deserts Summary Report](#), California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment, 2018). As the atmosphere heats, it can hold more water, and release it in sudden, intense events that may cause flash flooding during the winter months. In the summer months, the monsoon rain patterns that have historically contributed to 30 percent of the desert's annual rainfall are expected to dry up and disappear from the region. Models project there will be more "dry years" (with less than average rainfall) than "wet years" (with more than average rainfall). Finally, many areas in the desert are prone to high wind speeds, and wind speed is projected to increase by 10 percent by 2100.

Table 1. Projected Temperature Increases (in degrees Fahrenheit) in CA Desert

Year	Lower GHG Emissions	Higher GHG Emissions
Present - 2039	+5	+6
2040 - 2069	+6	+10
2070 - 2100	+8	+14

Source: Table adapted from Figure 5, p. 14, Inland Desert Summary Report, California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment.

Table 2. Extreme Heat and Rainfall Projections for CA Desert by 2100

Climate Event	Present Day	2100	Percent Change
Extreme Heat Days/year (>95 degrees Fahrenheit)	90 (Mojave)	141 (Mojave)	+57%
Extreme Heat Days/year (>95 degrees Fahrenheit)	130 (Palm Springs)	179 (Palm Springs)	+38%
Annual Rainfall Average	5 inches	2.5 inches (dry years)	-50%
Annual Rainfall Average	5 inches	7-8 inches (wet years)	+40-60%

Source: Table adapted from “21st Century Climate Projections” section, pp. 14-21, Inland Desert Summary Report, California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment.

ANALYSIS:

More intense rainfall events, drier soils, and stressed and sparse vegetation in this arid region will increase the probability of flash foods across the collection sites. Dry soils are poor absorbers of rainfall, resulting in high runoff rates. Flash flooding can also leave behind large deposits of mud and debris which may damage roads and other infrastructure ([California OES, 2024](#)).

The lease premises will likely experience increased exposure to prolonged and extreme heat, unpredictable precipitation patterns, increased frequency of flash floods, and higher wind speeds for the duration of the lease term. These conditions may increase the risk of wildfire exposure and flooding to the lease premises and will also impact the health of native plant species populations in the region.

The proposed seed collection activities will support research on native species that will be impacted by climate change. The proposed activities are beneficial to conserve native plant species, protect biodiversity, and enhance ecosystem climate resilience.

RECOMMENDATION:

Pursuant to the proposed lease, the Applicant acknowledges that the lease premises and adjacent upland are located in an area that may be subject to the effects of climate change and will conduct any site visits to the lease premises accordingly.

CONCLUSION:

For all the reasons above, staff believes the approval of the lease application is in the best interests of the State. Staff recommend approval of this non-exclusive General Lease – Public Agency Use.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

1. Approval or denial of the application is a discretionary action by the Commission. Each time the Commission approves or rejects the use of State-owned school lands, it exercises legislatively delegated authority and responsibility as trustee of the State's school lands, as authorized by law.
2. This action is consistent with addressing the challenges and opportunities described in the Commission's 2021–2025 Strategic Plan to "Embrace and safeguard multi-benefit School Lands and resource management stewardship that equitably balances responsible local and regional economic development, supports living wages, environmental protection, and revenue generation."
3. Staff recommends that the Commission find that this activity is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as a categorically exempt project. The project is exempt under Class 6, Information Collection; California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15306.

Authority: Public Resources Code section 21084 and California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15061.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

It is recommended that the Commission:

CEQA FINDING:

Find that the activity is exempt from the requirements of CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15061 as a categorically exempt project, Class 6, Information Collection; California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15306.

STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:

Find that proposed lease is in the best interests of the State.

AUTHORIZATION:

Authorize issuance of a General Lease – Public Agency Use to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for Western Joshua Tree seed collection and associated data collection, for a term beginning August 25, 2026, and ending August 24, 2033; annual rent in the amount of \$167, for 87 parcels of State-owned school land (Lease Area), as shown on Figure 1, Location Maps 1 and 2, incorporated by reference herein.