



October 2, 2019

Mr. Kevin Chin  
**W&W Land Design Consultants, Inc.**  
2335 West Foothill Blvd., Suite 1  
Upland, California 91786

Subject: Results of survey to Update Habitat Assessment for Rancho Cucamonga Property  
(Tentative Tract 20152)

Dear Mr. Chin:

This letter report has been prepared to update a habitat assessment conducted on a small property in City of Rancho Cucamonga, San Bernardino County. The property, hereafter referred to the project site, consists of the development of five single-family homes on an approximately 3.36-acre parcel (Tentative Tract 20152). It is our understanding that the City of Rancho Cucamonga has requested that the habitat assessment conducted in 2010 be updated to evaluate the current potential of the project site to support the California gnatcatcher or other special status species. The site is located north of Interstate 210 and east of Etiwanda Avenue, at the current terminus of Arapaho Road.

### **CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER BIOLOGY**

The California gnatcatcher was listed by the USFWS as a threatened species in 1993 (USFWS 1993). Historically it occurred in California from the Santa Clara River Valley and northern San Fernando Valley south through the coastal foothills of San Diego County (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Habitat loss and fragmentation from expanding development and agriculture has been a major factor in the decline of this species in southern California (Atwood 1993). Critical habitat was designated for California gnatcatcher in 2007 (USFWS 2007).

The California gnatcatcher is a resident (non-migratory) songbird that nests and forages in moderately dense stands of coastal sage scrub occurring on arid hillsides, mesas, and washes. Coastal sage scrub communities dominated by California sagebrush, California buckwheat, and white sage seem to be preferred by this species, but shrub composition in occupied areas across the species' range varies, as does shrub community structure (height, density, etc.). Chaparral, riparian scrub, and ruderal habitats may be used occasionally for dispersal and foraging (Campbell et al. 1998), especially when these habitats are adjacent to occupied stands of coastal sage scrub. California gnatcatcher populations in inland areas usually occur in lower densities than in coastal sites, and generally occur in more open scrub habitats; as such, inland populations tend to have

larger home ranges than coastal populations. California gnatcatcher elevational limit is as high as 2,640 feet above mean sea level, but most occurrences are well below that, with populations generally below 1,800 feet in inland areas and 1,350 in coastal habitats (Atwood and Bontrager 2001).

## **METHODS**

Prior to conducting the survey, Leatherman BioConsulting, Inc. reviewed the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's California Natural Diversity Database (CDFW 2019), and other relevant available literature to search for historic and current records for the California gnatcatcher in the vicinity of the project site. Brian Leatherman, a California gnatcatcher permitted biologist with over 25 years of experience in southern California, subsequently visited the site on October 2, 2019 to re-evaluate the habitat and assess its potential to support the gnatcatcher.

The entire project site was surveyed by walking meandering transects to assess the current habitat for comparison with the description of the habitat conditions documented in the previous report (Leatherman BioConsulting, Inc. 2010). The emphasis of the survey was on evaluating the presence and suitability of habitat for the California gnatcatcher, but all wildlife observed or detected were recorded in field notes.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

The description of the habitat on the project site from the 2010 report is provided below.

The project site is a flat parcel of land dominated by non-native grasses and annual herbs. It appears to be periodically mowed or tilled, and is surrounded on all four sides by (residential) development. Small piles of yard waste were observed around the perimeter of the property, likely from adjacent residents. Dominant non-native plant species included rip-gut brome (*Bromus diandrus*) and red-stemmed filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*). Numerous other species were observed including wild oat (*Avena fatua*), foxtail barley (*Hordeum murinum*), soft chess (*Bromus hordeaceus*), white-stemmed filaree (*Erodium moschatum*), cheeseweed (*Malva parviflora*) and Lamb's quarters (*Chenopodium album*). One native herb, rancher's fiddleneck (*Amsinckia menzeisii*), occurred throughout the property. Nearly all of these species are common weedy plants that occur on vacant lots throughout southern California.

In the time since the previous assessment in 2010, it appears that the site was rough graded and the outline of the cul-de-sac road and housing pads remain discernible. The site is dominated by Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), known more commonly as tumbleweed. Several other non-native weeds also occur including big-leaved crownbeard (*Verbesina encelioides*), puncture vine (*Tribulus terrestris*), and common horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*). Common native weeds include jimson weed (*Datura wrightii*), annual bursage (*Ambrosia acanthocarpa*), doveweed (*Eremocarpus setigerus*) and telegraph weed (*Heterotheca grandiflora*). No native shrubs that make up sage scrub habitats occupied by the California gnatcatcher were observed.

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

In 2010, no habitat for the California gnatcatcher was documented on the project site. In fact, no individual shrubs of the many species that make up the coastal sage or alluvial fan sage scrub communities in which the gnatcatcher lives were observed. Based on the lack of suitable and the lack of records for the California gnatcatcher in the area, we concluded that the California gnatcatcher was not likely to occur at that time.

During the current survey, the make up the vegetation community on the property was found to be substantially different that when it was assessed in 2010. However, the project continues to be covered with (primarily) non-native weeds, and no coastal sage scrub elements or other vegetation that would be considered suitable habitat for the California gnatcatcher occurs on the site.

The status and distribution of the California gnatcatcher in San Bernardino County was reviewed by Liam et al. (1995). Although some records remain in question, six substantiated observations were made in southwestern San Bernardino County between 1990 and 1995, all in alluvial fan sage scrub habitat. These included observations in the Lytle Creek area (near its confluence with Cajon Wash), Etiwanda Fan, Jurupa Hills, and the Santa Ana River near Highland (Liam et al. 1995). Since that time, observations were made near Glen Helen Park in 2000 and Lytle Creek in 2003 (CNDDDB 2018), and a presumed nesting pair was discovered in 2008 near Redlands (Daniels pers. comm. 2008). The closest record to the project site is the record from the Etiwanda Fan. That record was from 1999 from the east side of Day Creek approximately 2 miles northwest of the project site. However, that site has been developed and no observations of California gnatcatcher have been reported for that area since (CDFW 2019). Although California gnatcatchers continue to be observed sporadically in the alluvial scrub along the Santa Ana River near Redlands and Highland, no recent records were found during the current records search in the vicinity of the project site, and no suitable habitat occur in the area.

## **CONCLUSION**

No coastal sage scrub or alluvial fan sage scrub habitat suitable for the California gnatcatcher was documented on the project site during a habitat assessment conducted in 2010, and no suitable habitat occurs on the project site or in the immediate area currently. Based on the lack of suitable habitat, the apparent lack of habitat in the vicinity, the lack of recent sightings of California gnatcatcher in the region, and professional judgment and experience, the California gnatcatcher is not expected to occur on the project site at this time.

If you have any comments or questions regarding the information in this report please contact me by phone at (714) 701-0863 or by email at [bleathermanwlb@aol.com](mailto:bleathermanwlb@aol.com). The references cited are included at the end of this letter report.

Sincerely,

LEATHERMAN BIOCONSULTING, INC.



Brian Leatherman  
Principal Biologist

### REFERENCES CITED

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