



An Employee-Owned Company

September 7, 2023

Ms. Stacey Love
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Carlsbad Field Office
2177 Salk Avenue, Suite 250
Carlsbad, CA 92008

Reference: Post-survey Notification of Focused Survey Results for the 2023 Least Bell's Vireo Surveys for the Riverford Road Roundabouts Project (DPW Project Number 1026299; RECON 9009-30)

Dear Ms. Love:

This letter is to notify the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) of the results of our focused surveys for the federally listed endangered least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) (hereinafter "vireo") conducted for the Riverford Road Roundabouts Project (project). The project area occurs at the interchanges of State Route 67 (SR-67) and Riverford Road and SR-67 and Woodside Avenue, in the unincorporated community of Lakeside in eastern San Diego County (Figures 1 and 2). The project involves the construction of two roundabouts at the existing SR-67/Riverford Road interchange, at two but closely spaced intersections, to relieve traffic congestion. The project also includes construction of pedestrian crosswalks, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes. The project boundary is situated within the El Cajon land grant of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute topographic map, El Cajon quadrangle (USGS 1994; see Figure 2).

Methods

RECON Environmental, Inc. (RECON) biologist Chris Thomson conducted eight focused surveys for vireo between May and July 2023, in accordance with the USFWS survey guidelines/protocol (USFWS 2001), under the USFWS 10(a)(1)(A) USFWS Endangered/Threatened Species Permit TE-797665. A notification letter, dated May 3, 2023, was submitted via e-mail to the USFWS, stating the intent to conduct vireo surveys at this project site. The surveys were focused within 14.4 acres of suitable riparian habitat¹, within the project boundary and a 300-foot buffer (survey area; Figure 3). Adjacent wetland and scrub areas along the edge of the riparian habitats were also surveyed to encompass potentially suitable foraging habitat. The vireo surveys were conducted at least 10 days apart, in accordance with the current USFWS survey guidelines/protocol (USFWS 2001). The survey visit dates, personnel, times, and weather conditions are provided in Table 1. All bird species observed during the surveys were noted. Surveys were not conducted in high heat, wind, rain, fog, or other inclement weather.

¹Please note that the project boundary and thus the survey area was revised slightly after the surveys were completed. An approximate 0.3 acre in the southwestern most portion of the survey area was not covered by the survey; however, given the presence of several observed least Bell's vireo use areas just northeast of this area, we consider this additional area to be occupied.

Table 1 Survey Dates, Personnel, Times, Conditions, and Results						
Date	Survey Number	Surveyor	Beginning Conditions	Ending Conditions	Acres Surveyed/ Hour	Results
5/9/2023	1	Chris Thomson	6:05 a.m.; 55°F; winds 0–1 mph; 100% cc	9:50 a.m.; 64°F; winds 0–2 mph; 10% cc	3.9	4 total: 1 individual observed, all others vocals only (northwest, northern, and northeast portions)
5/19/2023	2	Chris Thomson	5:55 a.m.; 58°F; winds 0–1 mph; 100% cc	9:10 a.m.; 61°F; winds 0–1 mph; 100% cc	4.5	4 total: 3 individuals observed, all others vocals only (northwest, northern, and northeast portions)
5/30/2023	3	Chris Thomson	6:10 a.m.; 56°F; winds 0–1 mph; 100% cc	9:20 a.m.; 63°F; winds 1–3 mph; 100% cc	4.6	4 total: 1 individual observed, all others vocals only (northwest, northern, and northeast portions)
6/9/2023	4	Chris Thomson	6:25 a.m.; 60°F; winds 0–1 mph; 100% cc	9:30 a.m.; 63°F; winds 1–2 mph; 100% cc	4.8	3 total: 1 individual observed, all others vocals only (northwest and northern portions)
6/20/2023	5	Chris Thomson	6:35 a.m.; 57°F; winds 0–1 mph; 100% cc	9:10 a.m.; 65°F; winds 1–3 mph; 10% cc	5.7	4 total: 1 individual observed, all others vocals only (northwest, northern, and northeast portions)
6/30/2023	6	Chris Thomson	6:20 a.m.; 61°F; winds 0–1 mph; 100% cc	9:25 a.m.; 67°F; winds 1–2 mph; 5% cc	4.8	3 individuals observed (northwest and northern portions)
7/10/2023	7	Chris Thomson	6:40 a.m.; 62°F; winds 0–1 mph; 100% cc	9:05 a.m.; 67°F; winds 1–2 mph; 0% cc	6.1	4 total: 3 individuals observed, all others vocals only (northwest, northern, and northeast portions)
7/24/2023	8	Chris Thomson	7:05 a.m.; 70°F; winds 1–2 mph; 60% cc	9:45 a.m.; 75°F; winds 1–3 mph; 0% cc	5.5	4 total: 2 individuals observed, all others vocals only (northwest, northern, and northeast portions)

°F = degrees Fahrenheit; mph = miles per hour; % = percent; cc = cloud cover

Existing Conditions

A total of 14.4 acres were identified within the survey area as supporting suitable habitat for vireo and, thus, survey efforts were focused on these areas (see Figure 3). Suitable nesting habitat found within the survey area includes southern cottonwood-willow riparian forest. Vegetation communities and land cover types that were not considered suitable for nesting were primarily excluded from the survey area. These areas included Diegan coastal sage scrub, disturbed habitat, and urban/developed land, due to a lack of suitable cover of willows or other riparian tree or shrub species to support vireo.

Suitable, high-quality nesting habitat occurs as a contiguous habitat in the northwest, northeast, and northern portions of the survey area along the San Diego River. One other potentially suitable habitat exists within a small patch of disturbed southern cottonwood-willow riparian forest that is isolated from the San Diego River, found north of the SR-67 southbound off-ramp and south of the existing commercial development. This patch of disturbed southern cottonwood-willow riparian forest is considered moderate quality habitat due to its isolated nature.

Dominant trees throughout the survey area are tree willows (*Salix gooddingii* and *S. lasiolepis*) and Fremont cottonwoods (*Populus fremontii*). The riparian habitat varies from sparsely to densely vegetated with varying amounts of native and non-native trees, shrubs, and other herbaceous vegetation. The survey area does not contain any areas mapped as Critical Habitat for vireo.

Results

Numerous vireo were detected within the survey area during the 2023 focused surveys. A total of 30 vireo detections were made during the 2023 focused surveys. Vireo were detected both visually and vocally during the focused surveys, with a total of 15 visual observations of vireo from May 9, 2023 to July 24, 2023. A single observation point is defined as a momentary observation where a bird was observed outside of any previously or subsequently identified use areas during other surveys. Two of the vireo visual observations occurred with no vocalization, suggesting that the individual vireos were potentially female; all remaining detections were audible males singing. No vireo breeding pairs, nesting behavior, or nests were observed.

Four vireo use areas were identified within or adjacent to the survey area (see Figure 3). Vireo use areas were extrapolated from the sum of the field observations made by the surveyors and represent the total area observed to be used by vireo during the current 2023 focused survey. Field data used to determine vireo use areas included breaks in vegetation and simultaneous detection of multiple counter-singing males.

In addition, several special-status species were detected during the focused surveys, including California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) species of special concern Vaux's swift (*Chaetura vauxi*), CDFW species of special concern and County sensitive Group 1 list yellow-breasted chat (*Icteria virens*), CDFW species of special concern and County sensitive Group 2 list yellow warbler (*Setophaga petechia*), CDFW watch list and County sensitive Group 1 list Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), CDFW watch list and County sensitive Group 2 list double-crested cormorant (*Nannopterum auritum*), CDFW watch list and County sensitive Group 2 list Belding's orange-throated whiptail (*Aspidoscelis hyperythra beldingi*), County sensitive Group 1 list red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), and County sensitive Group 2 list green heron (*Butorides virescens*) (see Figure 3). Multiple brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*), a brood parasite of least Bell's vireo, were detected during the 2023 focused surveys throughout the riparian corridor in the northwest, northern, and northeastern portions of the survey area. Vireo nest surveys were not conducted and brood parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds was not observed during focused surveys.

If you have any questions concerning the contents of this letter, please contact me at (619) 308-9333 extension 115 or cthomson@reconenvironmental.com.

Sincerely,



Chris Thomson
Biologist

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Ms. Stacey Love
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References Cited

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
2001 Least Bell's Vireo Survey Guidelines. January 19.

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)
1994 El Cajon quadrangle, California 7.5-minute topographic map.

Certification

I certify that the information in this survey report and attached exhibits fully and accurately represents my work.



Chris Thomson
Permit Number TE-797665

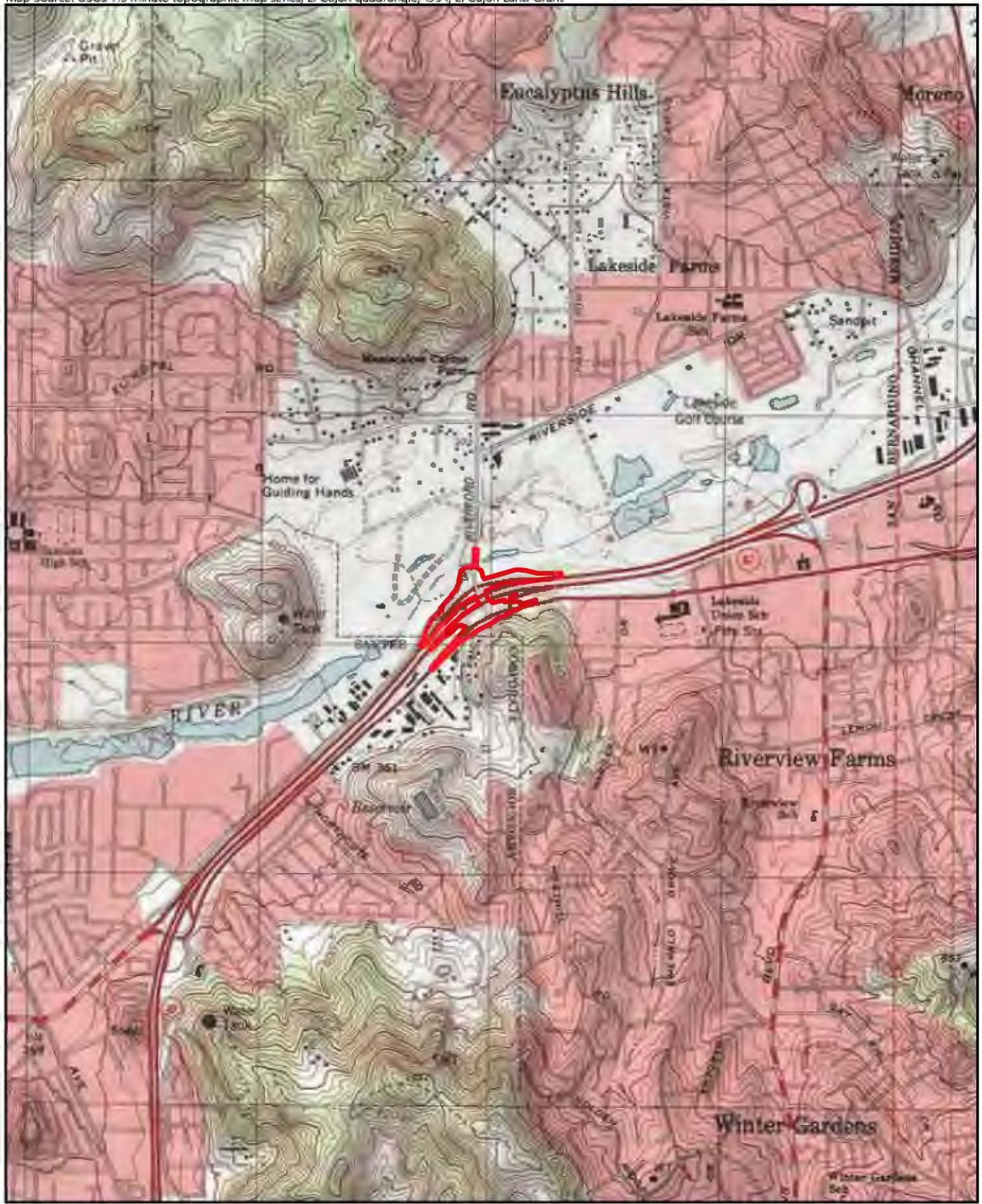
September 7, 2023

Date



 Project Location

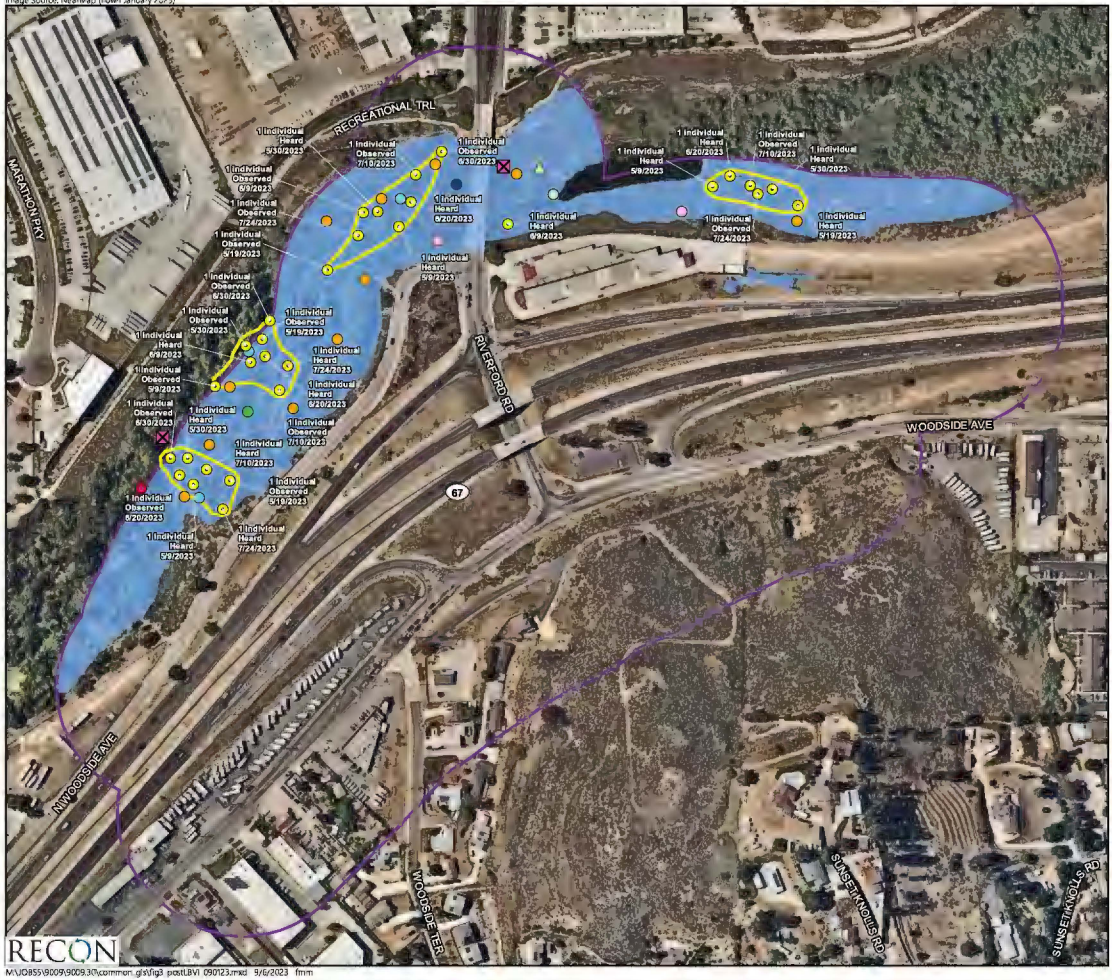
FIGURE 1
Regional Location



 Project Boundary

FIGURE 2
Project Location on USGS Map

Image Source: NearMap (taken January 2023)



- Wildlife Survey Area (300 feet)
 - Least Bell's Vireo Survey Area
(Southern Cotton-Willow Riparian Forest and Disturbed Southern Cotton-Willow Riparian Forest)
 - Least Bell's Vireo Use Areas
- Sensitive Wildlife Observations**
- Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)
 - Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*)
 - Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)
 - Least Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*)
 - Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)
 - Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*)
 - Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*)
 - Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*)
 - △ Orange-throated Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis hyperythra*)
- Parasitic Species Observations**
- Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*)



FIGURE 3
Least Bell's Vireo 2023 Survey Area and Results