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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 Coastal California Gnatcatcher 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 threatened coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) 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 three focused surveys for coastal California gnatcatcher in May, June, and July 2023 under the USFWS 10(a)(1)(A) Endangered/Threatened Species Permit TE-797665. RECON biologist JR Sundberg assisted under supervision during the surveys as a permit trainee. Before surveys were conducted, a 15-day notification letter dated May 3, 2023, was submitted via e-mail to the USFWS, stating the intent to conduct coastal California gnatcatcher surveys. The surveys were focused within 12.5 acres of suitable coastal scrub habitat[1], within the project boundary and a 300-foot buffer (survey area; Figure 3). The surveys were conducted in accordance with the USFWS survey protocol for this species (USFWS 1997). The survey visit dates, personnel, times, and weather conditions are provided in Table 1. Surveys were not conducted in high heat, wind, rain, fog, or other inclement weather. All bird species observed during the surveys were noted. In accordance with the survey guidelines (USFWS 1997), RECON biologists walked all portions of suitable habitat and periodically used recorded vocalizations in an attempt to elicit initial calls. Recorded vocalizations were not used in the vicinity of predators such as common raven (*Corvus corax*), Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), or northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*). As the survey area lies within an active Natural Community Conservation Planning area, three surveys were required.

[1] Please note that the project boundary and thus the survey area was revised slightly after the surveys were completed; however, based on the location and configuration of the changed boundaries, all areas were considered to have been adequately covered during the survey.

Table 1
Survey Dates, Personnel, Times, and Conditions

Date	Survey No.	Surveyor	Beginning Conditions	Ending Conditions	Acres Surveyed/ Hour	Results
5/18/2023	1	Chris Thomson, JR Sundberg*	6:40 a.m.; 57°F; winds 0–1 mph; 100% cc	9:55 a.m.; 60°F; winds 0–1 mph; 100% cc	3.3	6 total: 2 individual males observed calling and responding to recordings within survey area (southern portion); family of 4 observed foraging together oustide southern survey area boundary.
6/14/2023	2	Chris Thomson, JR Sundberg*	6:45 a.m.; 62°F; winds 0-1 mph; 100% cc	9:30 a.m.; 65°F; winds 1–2 mph; 100% cc	3.9	4 total: 1 pair and 1 individual male observed responding to recordings adjacent to, and outside southern survey area boundary. 1 additional male heard responding to playback outside southern survey area boundary.
7/26/2023	3	Chris Thomson, JR Sundberg*	6:40 a.m.; 72°F; winds 0-1 mph; 0% cc	8:40 a.m.; 81°F; winds 0-1 mph; 0% cc	5.3	5 total: 1 family of 4 and 1 individual female/juvenile observed calling and responding within the survey area (southern portion).

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

Exisiting Conditions

A total of 12.5 acres within the survey area were identified as supporting suitable habitat for the coastal California gnatcatcher and survey efforts were focused on these areas (see Figure 3). The northern and southern portions of the survey area, primarily, contain high-quality Diegan coastal sage scrub with a few small, disturbed areas of low to moderate quality Diegan coastal sage scrub. The Diegan coastal sage scrub is generally high in quality with dense native shrub cover of approximately 60 to 80 percent. Dominant species consist of California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*) and California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), with broom baccharis (*Baccharis sarothroides*) sparsely mixed throughout. The disturbed Diegan coastal sage scrub has similar dominant species, though it tends to be more open with more non-native grass (*Bromus* sp.) and mustard (*Brassica* sp.) species present. Critical habitat for coastal California gnatcatcher does not occur within the survey area.

Results

In total, two coastal California gnatcatcher use areas were identified within the survey area, both occurring in the southern portion of the survey area and extending beyond the survey area (see Figure 3). Detections within the survey area consisted of one pair, two family units, and five individual observation points (see Table 1). Four of these individual observation points were made adjacent to, and beyond the southern survey area boundary, with the furthest detection occurring approximately 80 feet beyond the southern survey area boundary (see Figure 3). A single observation point is defined as a momentary observation where a bird could not be followed due to the individual going quiet or having not been seen leaving the area. Coastal California gnatcatcher use areas were extrapolated from the sum of the mapped observation points; they represent the total observed area used by gnatcatcher during

the current 2023 breeding season. Field data used to determine coastal California gnatcatcher use areas included breaks in vegetation and simultaneous detection of multiple counter-singing males.

One additional federally listed avian species, least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), was detected during protocol coastal California gnatcatcher surveys. The least Bell's vireo is also state listed and a County sensitive Group 1 species. One individual least Bell's vireo was heard singing within riparian habitat in the northeastern portion of the survey area (see Figure 3). A separate post-survey report will be submitted detailing the results of the protocol survey effort for this species.

In addition, double-crested cormorant (*Nannopterum auritum*), a California Department of Fish and Wildlife Watch List species and County sensitive Group 2 species, was detected during these surveys. An individual double-crested cormorant was observed flying over the central portion of the survey area during these focused surveys.

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

Sincerely,

Chris Thomson
Biologist

CNT:sh

References Cited

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
1997 Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) Presence/Absence Survey Protocol. July.

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

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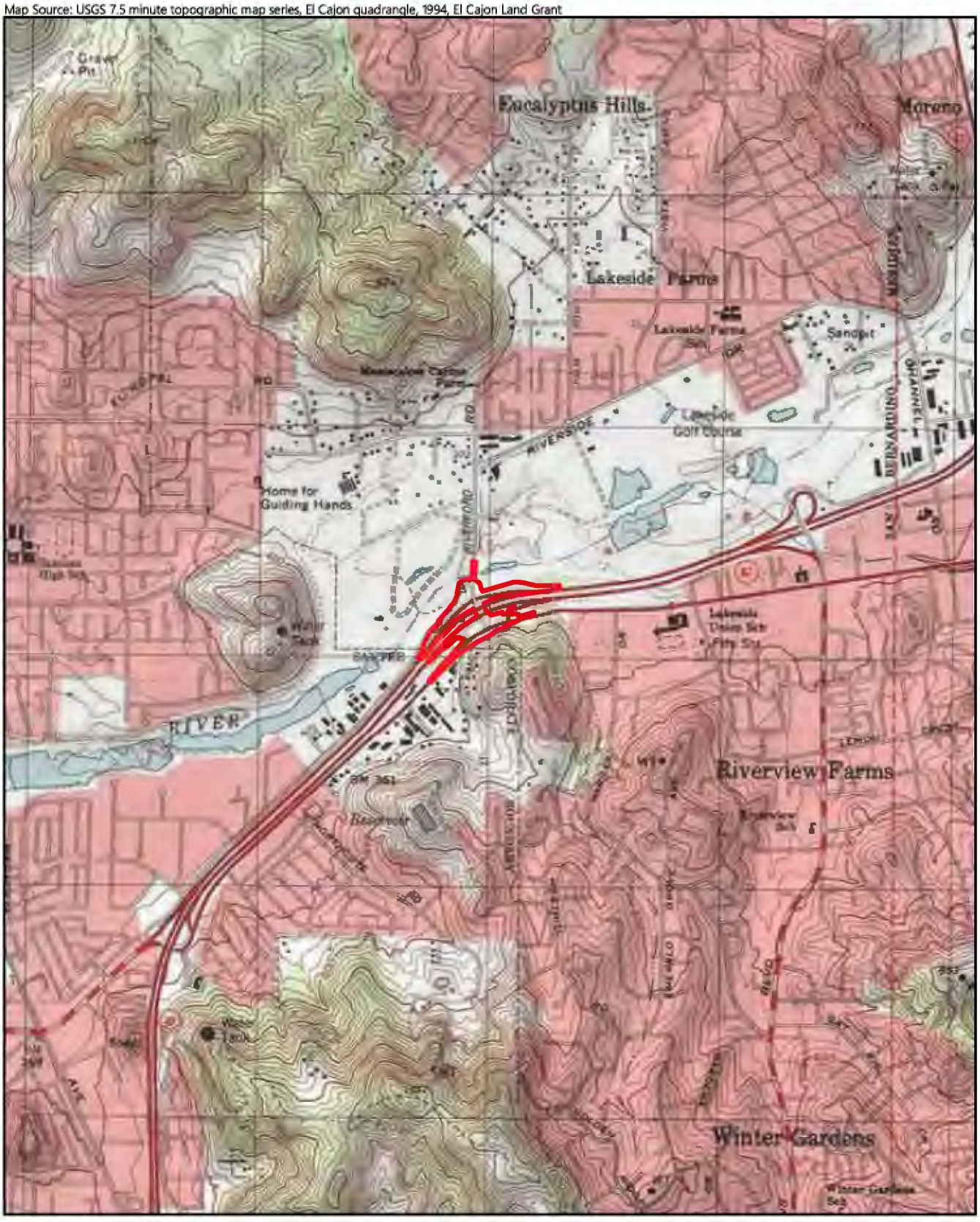
FIGURE 1
Regional Location

Map Source: USGS 7.5 minute topographic map series, El Cajon quadrangle, 1994, El Cajon Land Grant



Project Boundary

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FIGURE 2
Project Location on USGS Map

Wildlife Survey Area (300 feet)

Coastal California Gnatcatcher Survey Area (Diegan Coastal Sage Scrub)

Coastal California Gnatcatcher Use Areas

Sensitive Wildlife Observations

- Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*)
- Least Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*)

0 Feet 200

FIGURE 3

Coastal California Gnatcatcher
2023 Survey Area and Results