



June 16, 2015

Ms. Stacey Love
Recovery Permit Coordinator
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
2177 Salk Avenue, Suite 250
Carlsbad, California 92008

VIA EMAIL AND MAIL
stacey_love@fws.gov

Subject: Results of Focused Presence/Absence Coastal California Gnatcatcher Surveys for Segment C of the Proposed Park to Playa Trail Project, Los Angeles County, California

Dear Ms. Love:

This Letter Report presents the results of focused breeding season surveys for the coastal California gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica californica*) for Segment C of the proposed Park to Playa Trail (hereinafter referred to as the “project site”) located in Los Angeles County, California. The purpose of the focused surveys was to determine the presence or absence of the coastal California gnatcatcher on or immediately adjacent to the project site. Surveys were conducted by a biologist who holds the necessary Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA) survey permit and according to guidelines established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

PROJECT LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

Segment C of the proposed Park to Playa Trail Project is located in the Baldwin Hills area of the western section of Los Angeles County in the City of Culver City (Exhibits 1 and 2). Segment C comprises the western section of the Park to Playa Trail Project, which totals approximately seven miles of trails throughout unincorporated Los Angeles County, and the cities of Los Angeles and Culver City. Jurisdictions surrounding the project site include the City of Los Angeles to the north and east; the City of Inglewood to the south; and the City of Culver City to the west.

The approximate 26-acre project site is located south of the Santa Monica Freeway (Interstate [I] 10) between Jefferson Boulevard and Rodeo Road to the north, Jefferson Boulevard and Ballona Creek to the west, West Slauson Avenue to the south, and La Cienega Boulevard to the east. The Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area is located across La Cienega Boulevard (to the east). The project site is located on the U.S. Geological Survey’s (USGS’) Beverly Hills and Hollywood 7.5-minute quadrangle maps (Sections 07, 08, Township 2 S, Range 14 W).

The Baldwin Hills are a group of northwest-to-southeast trending hills in the West Los Angeles area. Topography on the project site consists of moderate hills with hilltops that have been leveled for oil and gas production. Elevations range from 175 feet above mean sea level (msl) at the eastern edge towards La Cienega Boulevard, to 420 feet above msl at the northwestern corner of the project site.

The Baldwin Hills are primarily used for active recreation, habitat restoration and preservation, and oil and gas production. Vegetation on the approximate 26-acre survey area includes a scattered and patchy distribution of various native and non-native vegetation types and other

open areas as a result of the land uses on site and past disturbances. Vegetation types and other areas in the survey area consist of annual brome grasslands, California sagebrush-California buckwheat scrub, California sagebrush-California buckwheat scrub/disturbed, developed, disturbed, ornamental, ruderal, and toyon chaparral.

The survey area for these surveys included all areas within the project site that supported vegetation potentially suitable for the coastal California gnatcatcher. Potential habitat for the coastal California gnatcatcher on the project site primarily consisted of California sagebrush – California buckwheat scrub and California sagebrush – California buckwheat scrub/disturbed vegetation (Exhibit 3). These areas are co-dominated by species such as California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*) and California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), with additional common plant species present including sticky monkeyflower (*Mimulus aurantiacus*), prickly pear (*Opuntia* sp.), lemonade berry (*Rhus integrifolia*), purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), and black sage (*Salvia mellifera*). The two scrub habitats are similar other than the establishment of several non-native species within the California sagebrush – California buckwheat scrub/disturbed vegetation due to apparent site disturbance. These species include slender wild oats (*Avena barbata*), black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*), hare barley (*Hordeum murinum* var. *leporinum*), and wild radish (*Raphanus sativus*).

BACKGROUND

The coastal California gnatcatcher is a federally Threatened species and a California Species of Special Concern. This species occurs in most of Baja California, Mexico's arid regions, but this subspecies is extremely localized in the United States, where it predominantly occurs in coastal regions of highly urbanized Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Diego Counties (Atwood 1992). In California, this subspecies is an obligate resident of coastal sage scrub vegetation types. The breeding season for the coastal California gnatcatcher ranges from late February to July. Nests are generally located in various materials in sagebrush about three feet above ground. Brood parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) and loss of habitat to urban development has been cited as causes of coastal California gnatcatcher population decline (Unitt 1984; Atwood 1990).

Taxonomic studies indicate that the coastal California gnatcatcher consists of four subspecies that extend from southwestern California to southern Baja California, Mexico. The coastal California gnatcatcher, the northernmost gnatcatcher subspecies, is restricted to lowland areas from central Ventura County through Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange, and San Diego Counties to the Baja California, Mexico border (Atwood and Lerman 2006; Mellink and Rea 1994). Formerly, the coastal California gnatcatcher was common from the San Fernando Valley eastward along the base of the San Gabriel Mountains to Claremont (Atwood 1990). The coastal California gnatcatcher is now rare in the northern part of its range with only a handful of sightings from Santa Clarita to Tujunga Wash, though a small population persists near the City of Moorpark in Ventura County.

The coastal California gnatcatcher has been recorded from sea level to approximately 3,000 feet above msl (USFWS 2003); however, greater than 90 percent of gnatcatcher records are from between sea level and 820 feet above msl along the coast and between sea level and 1,800 feet above msl inland (Atwood and Bolsinger 1992). USFWS estimates regarding the population size of the coastal California gnatcatcher in Southern California have been about 3,000 pairs (Atwood and Bontrager 2001). In the *5-year Review: Summary and Evaluation* for the gnatcatcher, the USFWS states that a recent study (Winchell and Doherty 2008) estimated that there were approximately 1,324 gnatcatcher pairs over approximately 111,000 acres on public and quasi-public lands in Orange and San Diego Counties. Because the Winchell and Doherty study only covered a portion of the U.S. range (focusing on the coast and limited to one year), this study cannot extrapolate beyond the sampling region; however, the USFWS states that it is likely there are more gnatcatchers in the U.S. portion of the range than was suggested by earlier estimates (USFWS 2010).

The coastal California gnatcatcher typically occurs in coastal and inland sage scrub vegetation types. Sage scrub vegetation often occurs in a patchy distribution pattern throughout the range of the gnatcatcher. Coastal California gnatcatchers also use chaparral, grassland, and riparian habitats that are in proximity to sage scrub vegetation types. These non-sage scrub habitats are used for dispersal and foraging (Atwood et al. 1998; Campbell et al. 1998; USFWS 2003). Availability of these non-sage scrub areas is essential during certain times of the year, particularly during drought conditions or for dispersal, foraging, or nesting (USFWS 2003).

Other than one sighting in 1980 (Atwood 1980), and a non-breeding season observation in 2014 (BonTerra Psomas 2014), there are no historical records for the coastal California gnatcatcher in the Baldwin Hills. The nearest known established populations of coastal California gnatcatchers to the Baldwin Hills are on the Palos Verdes Peninsula (26 kilometers [km] to the south) and the Montebello Hills (23 km to the east) (Garrett 2001). Additional gnatcatcher surveys have been conducted on the project site and surrounding areas since that time with negative results (Leatherman BioConsulting 2012). However, recent observations of the coastal California gnatcatcher have occurred at the Ballona Wetlands (seven kilometers [km] to the southwest) and the El Segundo Dunes located about two to three km south of the Ballona Wetlands (eBird 2014). At the latter location, the coastal California gnatcatcher nested successfully in 2013 (Walker 2013).

The USFWS published a Revised Final Rule designating critical habitat for the coastal California gnatcatcher in 2007 (USFWS 2007). This revised rule designates 197,303 acres of critical habitat in San Diego, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and Ventura Counties, California. The project site is not located within the designated critical habitat area for this species.

SURVEY METHODS

The USFWS' coastal California gnatcatcher survey protocol recommends six visits to all potentially occupied habitat areas for surveys conducted entirely within the breeding season, which extends from March 15 to June 30 (USFWS 1997a, 1997b). All visits must take place at least 1 week apart during the morning hours, and no more than 80 acres of suitable habitat may be surveyed per visit. BonTerra Psomas Senior Biologist Lindsay Messett (USFWS Permit No. TE067064-2) conducted six focused survey visits on March 19, 26, and April 3, 16, 23, 30, 2015.

Weather conditions met the USFWS survey protocol requirements for optimal gnatcatcher detection. Weather conditions that were too cold (below 55 degrees Fahrenheit [°F]), too hot (above 95°F), or too windy (wind speed greater than 15 miles per hour) were avoided. Surveys were conducted by slowly walking through all appropriate habitats (i.e., scrub) while listening and watching for gnatcatcher activity and by using a combination of taped recordings of gnatcatcher vocalizations and “pishing” sounds. While all areas of the survey area containing suitable habitat were surveyed, particularly close attention was given to the California sagebrush – California buckwheat scrub and California sagebrush – California buckwheat scrub/disturbed habitats. Taped recordings of gnatcatcher vocalizations were played as an attempt to elicit responses from any gnatcatchers present. The frequency of vocalization playback varied depending on conditions such as habitat patch size, topography in each area, and ambient noise conditions. All bird species detected during the surveys were recorded, which included notable observations of special status species or other birds, such as the brood parasitic brown-headed cowbird (Attachment A).

SURVEY RESULTS

No coastal California gnatcatchers were observed or detected on the project site during the focused surveys. Survey dates, times, and weather data for the focused coastal California gnatcatcher surveys are shown in Table 1 below. No brown-headed cowbirds were observed during the course of the surveys.

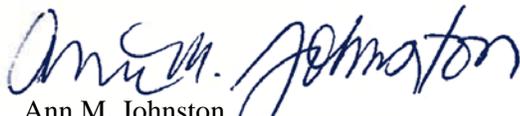
**TABLE 1
 SUMMARY OF BREEDING SEASON
 COASTAL CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER SURVEYS**

Survey Number	Date	Time (Start/End)	Surveyors	Weather Conditions			Gnatcatchers Observed and/or Detected
				Temperature (°F) (Start/End)	Wind (mph) (Start/End)	Cloud Cover (%) (Start/End)	
1	March 19, 2015	0700/1000	Messett	63/67	0-1/0-1	60/30	No gnatcatchers were observed or detected.
2	March 26, 2015	0700/1000	Messett	61/71	0-1/0-3	10/10	No gnatcatchers were observed or detected.
3	April 3, 2015	0700/1015	Messett	59/64	0-1/0-2	Clear/Clear	No gnatcatchers were observed or detected.
4	April 16, 2015	0735/1030	Messett	63/76	0-1/0-3	Clear/Clear	No gnatcatchers were observed or detected.
5	April 23, 2015	0700/1010	Messett	65/68	0-1/0-1	Clear/Clear	No gnatcatchers were observed or detected.
6	April 30, 2015	0700/1030	Messett	61/75	0-1/0-2	20/50	No gnatcatchers were observed or detected.

°F: degrees Fahrenheit; mph: miles per hour

Please contact Marc Blain at (626) 351-2000 if you have questions or comments.

Sincerely,
BonTerra Psomas


 Ann M. Johnston
 Vice President, Resource Management


 Marc T. Blain
 Senior Project Manager

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


 Lindsay A. Messett
 Senior Biologist
 (PRT No. 067064-2)

Enclosures: Exhibit 1 –Regional Location
 Exhibit 2 – Local Vicinity
 Exhibit 3 – Survey Area
 Attachment A – Wildlife Compendium

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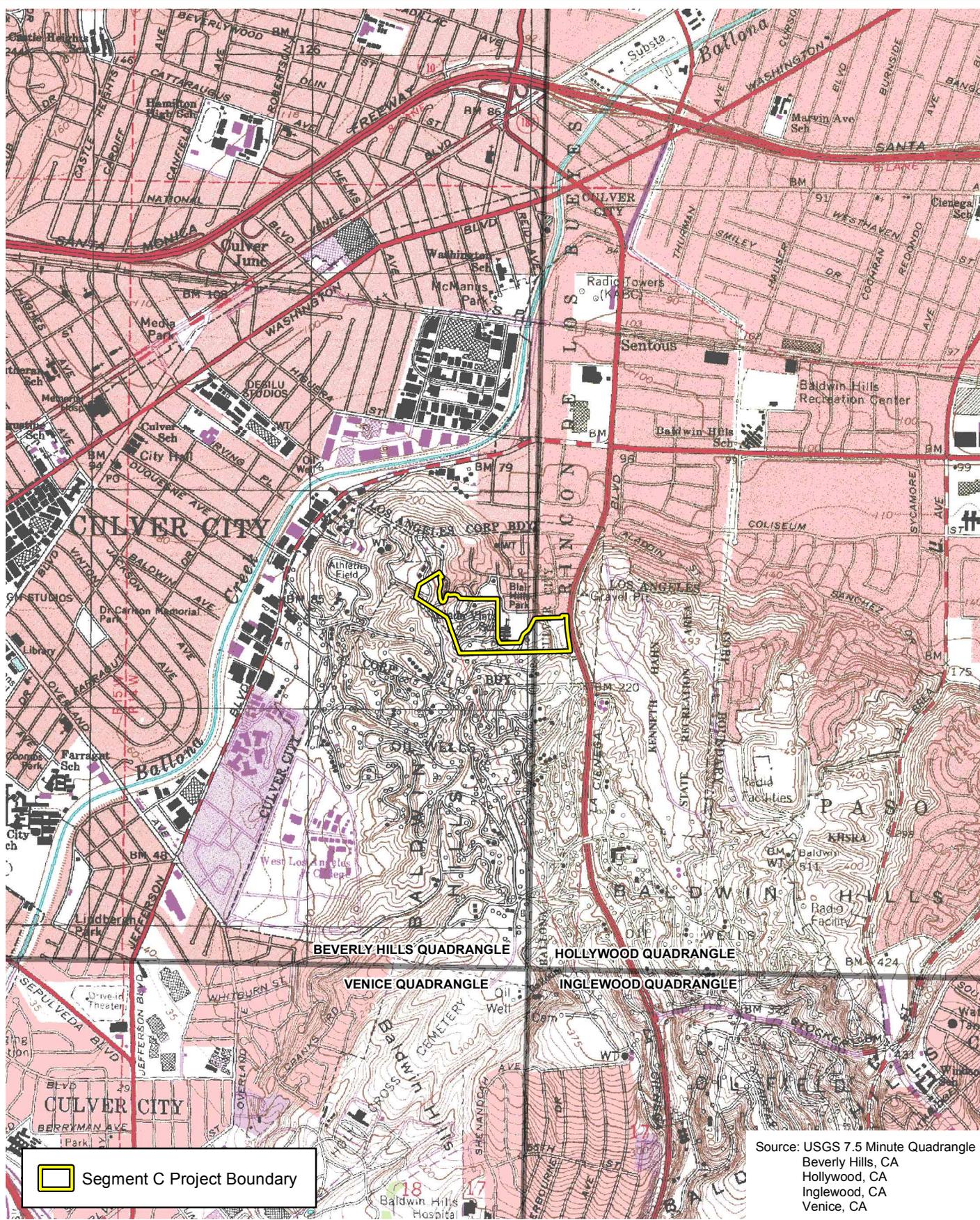
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 Segment C Project Boundary

Source: USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangle
 Beverly Hills, CA
 Hollywood, CA
 Inglewood, CA
 Venice, CA

Local Vicinity

Park to Playa Trail Project – Segment C

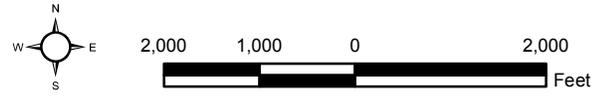
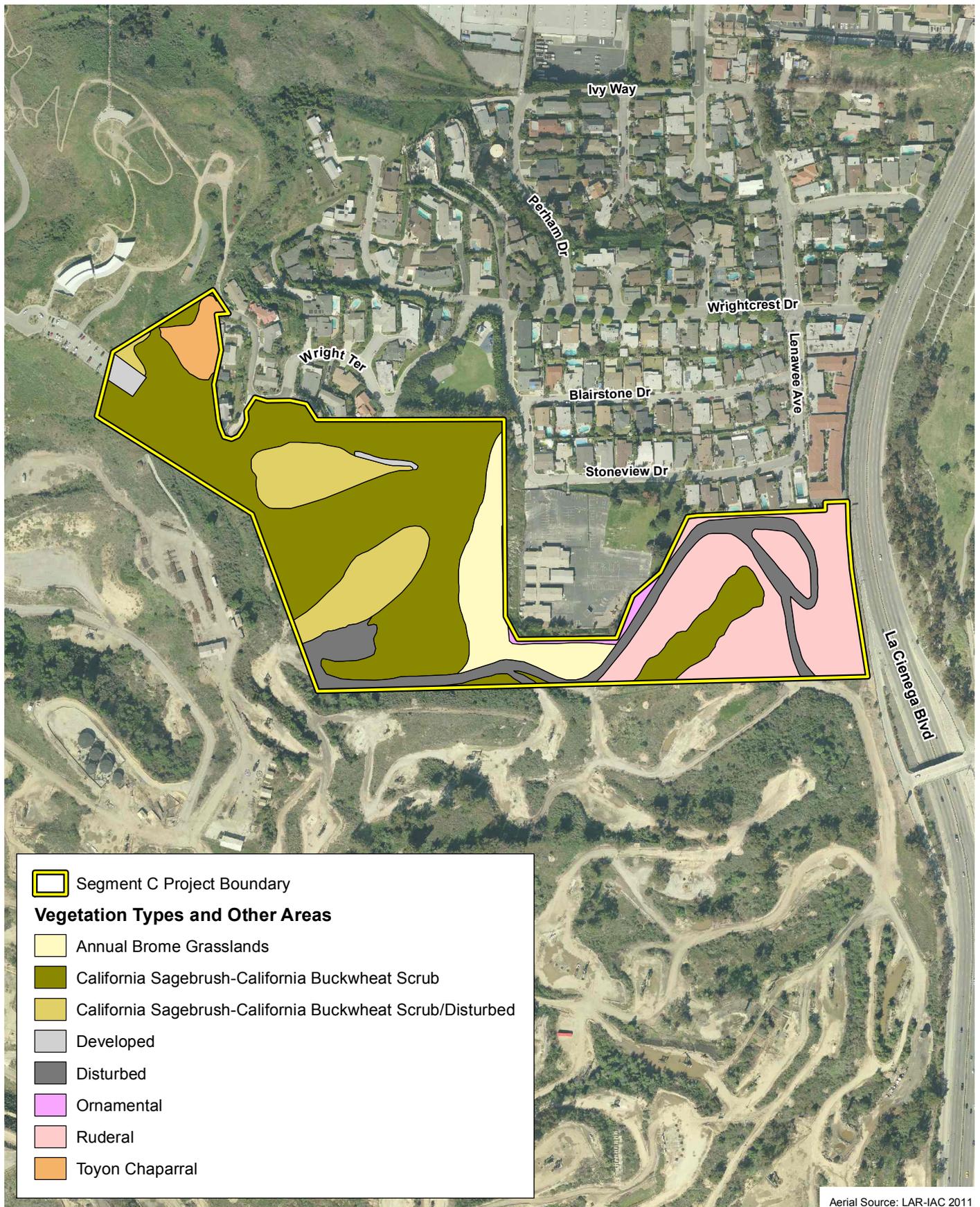


Exhibit 2



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Aerial Source: LAR-IAC 2011

Vegetation Types and Other Areas

Exhibit 3

Park to Playa Trail Project – Segment C



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ATTACHMENT A
WILDLIFE COMPENDIUM

**WILDLIFE SPECIES OBSERVED DURING FOCUSED COASTAL
CALIFORNIA GNATCHATCHER SURVEYS**

Species	
REPTILES	
LEPIDOSAURIA – LIZARDS AND SNAKES	
<i>PHRYNOSOMATIDAE</i> – ZEBRA-TAILED, FRINGE-TOED, SPINY, TREE, SIDE-BLOTCHED, AND HORNED LIZARDS	
<i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i>	western fence lizard
<i>Uta stansburiana</i>	side-blotched lizard
<i>ANGUIDAE</i> – ALLIGATOR LIZARDS	
<i>Elgaria multicarinata</i>	southern alligator lizard
BIRDS	
AVES – BIRDS	
<i>ACCIPITRIDAE</i> – HAWKS, KITES, EAGLES, AND ALLIES	
<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	Cooper's hawk
<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	red-tailed hawk
<i>CHARADRIIDAE</i> – PLOVERS	
<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	killdeer
<i>COLUMBIDAE</i> – PIGEONS AND DOVES	
<i>Columba livia</i>	rock pigeon
<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Eurasian collared-dove
<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	mourning dove
<i>TROCHILIDAE</i> – HUMMINGBIRDS	
<i>Calypte anna</i>	Anna's hummingbird
<i>Selasphorus sasin</i>	Allen's hummingbird
<i>PICIDAE</i> – WOODPECKERS	
<i>Picoides nuttallii</i>	Nuttall's woodpecker
<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	northern flicker
<i>TYRANNIDAE</i> – TYRANT FLYCATCHERS	
<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	black phoebe
<i>Sayornis saya</i>	Say's phoebe
<i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>	ash-throated flycatcher
<i>Tyrannus vociferans</i>	Cassin's kingbird
<i>CORVIDAE</i> – CROWS AND JAYS	
<i>Aphelocoma californica</i>	western scrub-jay
<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	American crow
<i>Corvus corax</i>	common raven
<i>HIRUNDINIDAE</i> – SWALLOWS	
<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	northern rough-winged swallow
<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>	cliff swallow
<i>AEGITHALIDAE</i> – BUSHTITS	
<i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>	bushtit
<i>TROGLODYTIDAE</i> – WRENS	
<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	house wren
<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	Bewick's wren
<i>POLIOPTILIDAE</i> – GNATCATCHERS AND GNATWRENS	
<i>Polioptila caerulea</i>	blue-gray gnatcatcher

**WILDLIFE SPECIES OBSERVED DURING FOCUSED COASTAL
CALIFORNIA GNATCHATCHER SURVEYS**

Species	
<i>MIMIDAE – THRASHERS</i>	
<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	northern mockingbird
<i>STURNIDAE – STARLINGS</i>	
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	European starling
<i>EMBERIZIDAE – SPARROWS AND JUNCOS</i>	
<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	spotted towhee
<i>Melospiza [Pipilo] crissalis</i>	California towhee
<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	song sparrow
<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	white-crowned sparrow
<i>CARDINALIIDAE – CARDINALS AND ALLIES</i>	
<i>Passerina amoena</i>	lazuli bunting
<i>ICTERIDAE – BLACKBIRDS</i>	
<i>Icterus cucullatus</i>	hooded oriole
<i>FRINGILLIDAE – FINCHES</i>	
<i>Haemorhous [Carpodacus] mexicanus</i>	house finch
<i>Spinus [Carduelis] psaltria</i>	lesser goldfinch
<i>PASSERIDAE – OLD WORLD SPARROWS</i>	
<i>Passer domesticus</i> *	house sparrow
MAMMALS	
MAMMALIA – MAMMALS	
<i>SCIURIDAE – SQUIRRELS</i>	
<i>Otospermophilus beecheyi</i> [formerly in <i>Spermophilus</i>]	California ground squirrel
<i>GEOMYIDAE – POCKET GOPHERS</i>	
<i>Thomomys bottae</i>	Botta's pocket gopher
<i>LEPORIDAE – HARES AND RABBITS</i>	
<i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i>	desert cottontail
* introduced	