



INFORMATION SUMMARY

- A. Report Date: December 3rd, 2018
- B. Report Title: Coastal California Gnatcatcher Focused Surveys for the 15.86 Acre Snow Drop Road Improvements Study Area, Unincorporated San Bernardino County, California.
- C. Project Location: USGS 7.5' series Cucamonga Peak Quadrangle, 2-mile reach of Archibald Avenue, Haven Avenue and Snow Drop Road extending immediately north of the City of Rancho Cucamonga.
- D. Project Contact: Albert A. Webb Associates
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- E. Project Biologist: Cadre Environmental
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USFWS permit #TE780566-14, CDFW permit #02243
- F. Date of Surveys: August 8th, 24th, September 6th, 19th, October 2nd, 17th, 31st, November 14th, and 28th, 2018.
- G. Summary: The 15.86-acre study area is dominated by developed/disturbed (existing roads), coastal sage scrub and chaparral vegetation communities. The study area also possesses soils and Riversidean alluvial fan sage scrub vegetation characteristic of a historic alluvial fan which no longer experiences extensive episodic scouring.

Based on the results of the biological resources constraints analysis conducted in June 2018 by Cadre Environmental, presence of coastal sage scrub onsite and historic records of the federally threatened coastal California gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica californica*) within the vicinity of the study area, focused United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) focused surveys were initiated during the summer and fall (non-breeding season) of 2018. Therefore, as described in the following report, all suitable coastal California gnatcatcher habitat (4.8-acres) was surveyed to determine the current status of the species onsite.

Coastal California gnatcatcher observations were documented within and adjacent to the study area during two (2) of the nine (9) focused USFWS focused survey efforts. A single individual (juvenile) was documented within and adjacent to the southeast region of the study area (Riversidean sage scrub vegetation).

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SUBJECT

Focused Coastal California Gnatcatcher Surveys for the 15.86 Acre Snow Drop Road Improvements Study Area, Unincorporated San Bernardino County, California.

This report presents the findings of focused coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) surveys conducted for the 15.86-acre Snow Drop Road improvements project study area located in unincorporated San Bernardino County, California (“Study Area”) as illustrated in Attachment A, *Regional Location Map*. Specifically, the Study Area includes a 2-mile reach of Archibald Avenue, Haven Avenue and Snow Drop Road extending immediately north of the City of Rancho Cucamonga as illustrated in Attachment B, *Vegetation Communities Map*.

This report incorporates the findings of a habitat assessment, literature review, compilation of existing documentation, and focused coastal California gnatcatcher surveys conducted on August 8th, 24th, September 6th, 19th, October 2nd, 17th, 31st, November 14th, and 28th, 2018.

METHODS OF STUDY

APPROACH

Prior to initiating the focused surveys, a biological resources constraints analysis was conducted to determine the presence and/or absence of suitable habitat for sensitive floral and faunal species to occur within the Study Area (Cadre Environmental 2018). The constraints analysis included a review of all available and relevant data on the biological characteristics, sensitive habitats, and species potentially present on or adjacent to the Study Area. Additionally, aerial photography and USGS topographic map data were examined. After conducting the habitat assessment and reviewing the available information, Cadre Environmental initiated focused surveys.

General/Sensitive Wildlife Inventory

All general and sensitive wildlife identified during the focused coastal California gnatcatcher surveys by sight, call, tracks, scat, or other characteristic sign were recorded. In addition to species actually detected, expected use of the site by other wildlife was derived from the analysis of habitats on the site, combined with known habitat preferences of regionally occurring wildlife species.

Focused Coastal California Gnatcatcher Surveys

Protocol surveys for the federally threatened/state species of special concern, coastal California gnatcatcher were performed in all areas of suitable habitat within the Study Area. Specifically, a total of 4.8 acres of suitable habitat were surveyed. As stated by the USFWS:

“Surveys shall be conducted between 6:00am and 12:00pm. Surveys shall avoid periods of excessive or abnormal heat, wind, rain, or other inclement weather. Taped coastal California gnatcatcher vocalization shall be used only until individuals have been initially located. Tapes shall not be used frequently or to illicit further behaviors from the birds. Surveys shall be conducted by slowly walking survey routes. Sites with deep canyons, ridgelines, steep terrain, and thick shrub cover should be surveyed more slowly. Prevailing site conditions and

professional judgment must be applied to determine appropriate survey routes and acreage covered per day. These factors may dictate that the maximum daily coverage specified below is not prudent under certain conditions. No more than 100 acres (40ha) shall be surveyed per biologist per day.” (USFWS 1997)

Surveys were conducted in accordance with the 1997 USFWS guidelines for projects located outside of an NCCP, which stipulates that during the breeding season (March 15th to June 30th), a minimum of six (6) surveys shall be conducted in all areas of suitable habitat with at least seven (7) days between site visits and surveys conducted between June 30th and March 15th, a minimum of nine (9) surveys shall be conducted with at least fourteen (14) days between site visits. Therefore, nine (9) surveys were conducted during the non-breeding season. Surveys were not conducted during extreme weather conditions (i.e., winds exceeding 15 miles per hour, rain, or temperatures in excess of 95°F). The Study Area was surveyed on foot by walking slowly and methodically throughout all suitable habitats. Presence of coastal California gnatcatchers was determined by identification of birds by sight and call, using a combination of taped vocalization and "pishing" sounds. The use of taped vocalizations was utilized only when necessary to elicit a response from birds potentially present on site.

Focused surveys were conducted on August 8th, 24th, September 6th, 19th, October 2nd, 17th, 31st, November 14th, and 28th, 2018 by permitted coastal California gnatcatcher biologist Ruben Ramirez (USFWS Permit 780566-14, CDFW 002243), as outlined in Table 1, *Coastal California Gnatcatcher Survey Schedule*.

Table 1 – Coastal California Gnatcatcher Survey Schedule

Survey	Dates (Conditions) 2018	Results
1	August 8 th - 70°F to 82°F, winds 2-8 mph, no rain	None
2	August 24 th - 66°F to 79°F, winds 2-6 mph, no rain	None
3	September 6 th - 64°F to 77°F, winds 0-4 mph, no rain,	None
4	September 19 th - 70°F to 82°F, winds 2-10 mph, no rain	None
5	October 2 nd - 70°F to 88°F, winds 2-4 mph, no rain	Juvenile CAGN Detected
6	October 17 th - 69°F to 78°F, winds 2-8 mph, no rain	None
7	October 31 st - 62°F to 75F, winds 4-10 mph, no rain,	None
8	November 14 th - 55°F to 74°F, winds 4-10 mph, no rain	Juvenile CAGN Detected
9	November 28 th - 52°F to 62F, winds 2-4 mph, no rain	None

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Study Area is located at the foothills of the San Bernardino Mountains with elevations ranging from 2,277 ft. above mean sea level (AMSL) near the southern reach of the Study Area and 2,790 ft. AMSL along the northern reach of Snow Drop Road. Substrates are characterized as Soboba stony loamy sand, Hanford course sandy loam, Cieneba-Rock outcrop, and Cieneba sandy loam (USDA 2018). The Study Area is located immediately north of the highly developed region of the City of Rancho Cucamonga while the entire Study Area is located adjacent to existing open space undeveloped lands and low-density residential development.

VEGETATION COMMUNITIES

The 15.86-acre Study Area is dominated by developed/disturbed (existing road) and coastal sage scrub vegetation communities as described in this report, and illustrated in Attachment B, *Vegetation Communities Map*, and Attachments C to E, *Current Study Area Photographs*, and summarized in Table 1, *Study Area Vegetation Community Acreages*. Natural community names and hierarchical structure follows the “*Manual of California Vegetation*” (Sayer and Keeler-Wolf 2009) classification system, which has been refined and augmented where appropriate to better characterize the habitat types observed.

Developed/Disturbed

The majority of the Study Area is developed/disturbed totaling 9.49 acres. Developed regions include the paved reaches of Archibald Avenue, Haven Avenue, and Snow Drop Road. Disturbed regions of the Study Area include the unpaved reach of Snow Drop Road, areas generally devoid of vegetation or dominated by ruderal non-native species including filaree (*Erodium* sp.), black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), London rockets (*Sisymbrium irio*), Russian thistle (*Kali tragus*), horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*), tocalote (*Centaurea melitensis*), Italian thistle (*Carduus pycnocephalus*) and non-native grasses.

Table 1 – Study Area Vegetation Community Acreages

Vegetation Community	Acres
<i>Developed/Disturbed</i>	9.49
<i>Coastal Sage Scrub – Black Sage Dominant</i>	2.08
<i>Riversidean Alluvial Fan Sage Scrub</i>	1.51
<i>Coastal Sage Scrub – California Sage Dominant</i>	1.21
<i>Chamise Chaparral</i>	1.07
<i>Coast Live Oak (individual trees)</i>	0.21
<i>Eucalyptus Trees</i>	0.23
<i>Arroyo Willow Tree (individual tree)</i>	0.03
<i>Mulefat Scrub</i>	0.03
TOTAL	15.86

Source: Cadre Environmental 2018.

Coastal Sage Scrub – Black Sage Dominant

Coastal sage scrub – black sage dominant vegetation was documented throughout the Study Area totaling 2.08 acres. This vegetation community is dominated by black sage (*Salvia mellifera*). Other plant species documented in this vegetation community include California sage brush (*Artemisia californica*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), scrub oak (*Quercus berberidifolia*), chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), chaparral honeysuckle (*Lonicera interrupta*), and blue elderberry (*Sambucus cerulea*).

Riversidean Alluvial Fan Sage Scrub

Mature Riversidean alluvial fan sage scrub was documented within the floodprone area of Deer Creek wash totaling 1.51 acre. Species documented in this region include California sagebrush, California buckwheat, pinebush (*Ericameria pinifolia*), white sage (*Salvia apiana*), deerweed (*Acmispon glaber*), and chamise.

In addition to the plant species documented within this region of Deer Creek wash, the southeast region of the Study Area was classified as alluvial fan sage scrub based on soil types (rock – sandy/loam) and a review of aerial photographs which clearly indicate the current and past alluvial soil-vegetative signature. The southwestern region of Deer Creek wash where the Study Area is located has not been recently subjected to extensive scouring by flood waters due to flood control features which direct the majority of flows in the vicinity east of the Study Area. These efforts have resulted in increased vegetation densities in the southwest region of the Deer Creek wash with little to no open areas often associated with active alluvial systems.

Coastal Sage Scrub – California Sagebrush Dominant

Coastal sage scrub – California sagebrush dominant vegetation was documented throughout the Study Area totaling 1.21 acres. This vegetation community is dominated by California sagebrush. Other plant species documented in this vegetation community include black sage, California buckwheat, deerweed, and sawtooth goldenbush (*Hazardia squarrosa*).

Chamise Chaparral

A few patches of chamise chaparral were documented in the western region of the Study Area totaling 1.07 acre. Species documented in this vegetation community include chamise, ceanothus (*Ceanothus* sp.), toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), and chaparral yucca (*Hesperoyucca whipplei*).

Coast Live Oak

Several individual coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) trees were documented and mapped within the Study Area.

Eucalyptus Trees

Several Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus* sp.) trees were documented and mapped within the Study Area.

Arroyo Willow Tree

A single arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*) tree was documented and mapped within the Study Area.

Mulefat Scrub

A single small patch of mulefat scrub dominated by mulefat (*Baccharis salicifolia*) was documented and mapped within the Study Area.

RESULTS

Coastal California gnatcatcher observations were documented within and adjacent to the Study Area during two (2) of the nine (9) focused USFWS focused survey efforts. A single individual (juvenile) was documented within and adjacent to the southeast region of the Study Area (Riversidean sage scrub vegetation) as shown in Attachment F, *Coastal California Gnatcatcher Occurrence Map*.

General wildlife species documented onsite or within the vicinity during the site assessment and focused surveys include but are not limited to red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), black phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*), Say's phoebe (*Sayornis saya*), bushtit (*Psaltiriparus minimus*), California scrub jay (*Aphelocoma californica*), wrenit (*Chamaea fasciata*), yellow rumped warbler (*Setophaga coronata*), American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), acorn woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*), California towhee (*Melospiza crissalis*), spotted towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), lesser goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*), and house finch (*Haemorrhous mexicanus*).

DISCUSSION

The Study Area is located within the farthest northeastern extent of the Coastal California gnatcatcher range and individuals are infrequently detected within suitable coastal sage scrub in this region. Coastal California gnatcatcher were initially detected adjacent (west) of the Study Area in 2013 as shown in Attachment F, *Coastal California Gnatcatcher Occurrence Map (USFWS GIS Database 2018)*.

Based in the results of the focused surveys, coastal California gnatcatcher are expected to infrequently utilize 1.02 acre of Riversidean sage scrub located in the southeastern region of the Study Area for foraging, movement and breeding. The remaining patches of coastal sage scrub documented onsite in the northern region are either dominated by black sage, occur on steep slopes or are small and isolated. These areas are not expected to be frequently utilized by coastal California gnatcatcher.

Direct or indirect impacts to 1.02 acre of Riversidean sage scrub habitat where coastal California gnatcatcher have been recently as well as historically detected would require formal consultation with the USFWS. Based on the proposed project, the following procedures will ensure compliance with the federal Endangered Species Act.

1. The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is expected to make a "May Affect" determination respective of impacts to jurisdictional resources located within the Riversidean sage scrub vegetation characterized as occupied by coastal California gnatcatcher.
2. The USACE will initiate formal Section 7 consultation with the USFWS.
3. A Biological Assessment evaluating direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts will be developed (including proposed mitigation and conservation measures).
4. USFWS will issue a Biological Opinion.
5. USACE issues permit – Nationwide or Individual 404.
6. Project Applicant implements reasonable and prudent measures outlined in Biological Opinion.

REFERENCES

- Cadre Environmental. 2018. Biological Resources Constraints Assessment for the Snow Drop Road Improvements Project, Unincorporated San Bernardino County, California
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB). 2018a. Sensitive Element Record Search for the Cucamonga Peak Quadrangle. California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Sacramento, California. Accessed June 2018.
- Ecological Sciences Inc. 2014a. Results of a Habitat Suitability Evaluation, Snow Drop Road Improvement Project, San Bernardino County, California.
- Ecological Sciences Inc. 2014b. Addendum to Habitat Suitability Evaluation, Snow Drop Road Improvement Project, San Bernardino County, California.
- U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. December 19, 2007. Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Revised Designation of Critical Habitat for the Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*), Final Rule. Federal Register 72 (No. 243):72010-72213.
- U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. 1997. Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) Presence/Absence Survey Guidelines.

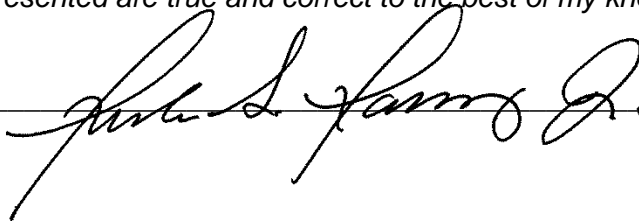
Attachments

- A – Regional Location Map**
- B – Vegetation Communities Map**
- D – Current Study Area Photographs**
- E – Current Study Area Photographs**
- F – Current Study Area Photographs**
- G – Coastal California Gnatcatcher Occurrence Map**

Certification

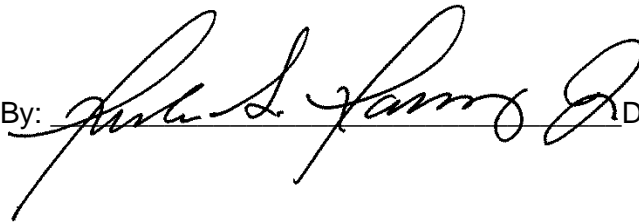
"I hereby certify that the statements furnished above and in the attached exhibits present the data and information required for this biological evaluation, and that the facts, statements, and information presented are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief."

Author: _____

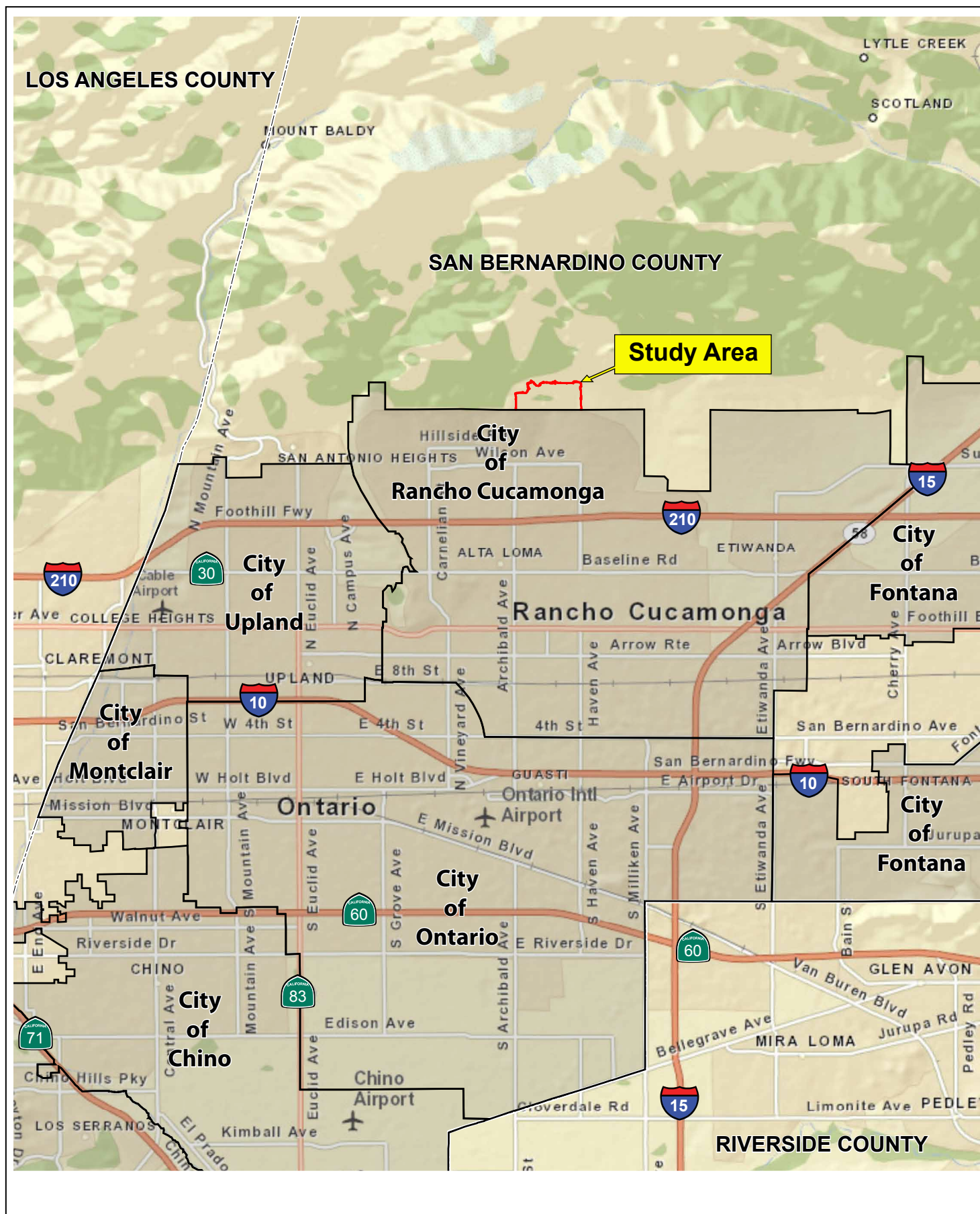


Date: December 3rd, 2018

Fieldwork Performed By: _____



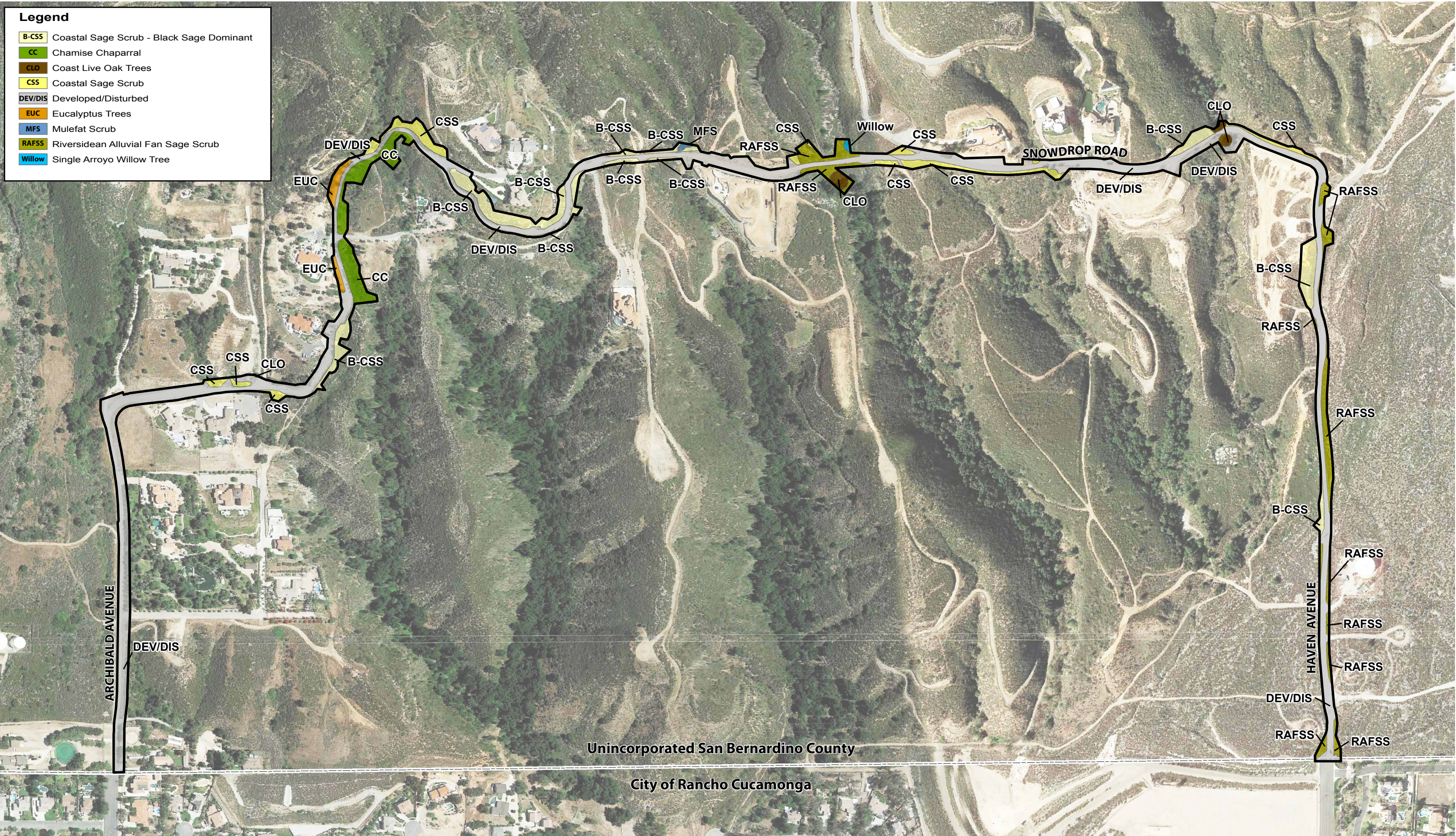
Date: December 3rd, 2018



Attachment A - Regional Location Map

*Coastal California Gnatcatcher Focused Surveys
Snow Drop Road Improvements Project*





Study Area (Unincorporated San Bernardino County)



PHOTOGRAPH 1 - Northward view of Haven Avenue - Haven Avenue is bordered by Riversidean alluvial fan sage scrub vegetation communities.



PHOTOGRAPH 2 - Westward view of Snow Drop Road from the intersection of Haven Avenue. The existing alignment of Snow Drop Road is developed and disturbed.

Refer to Attachment B for Photographic Key Map

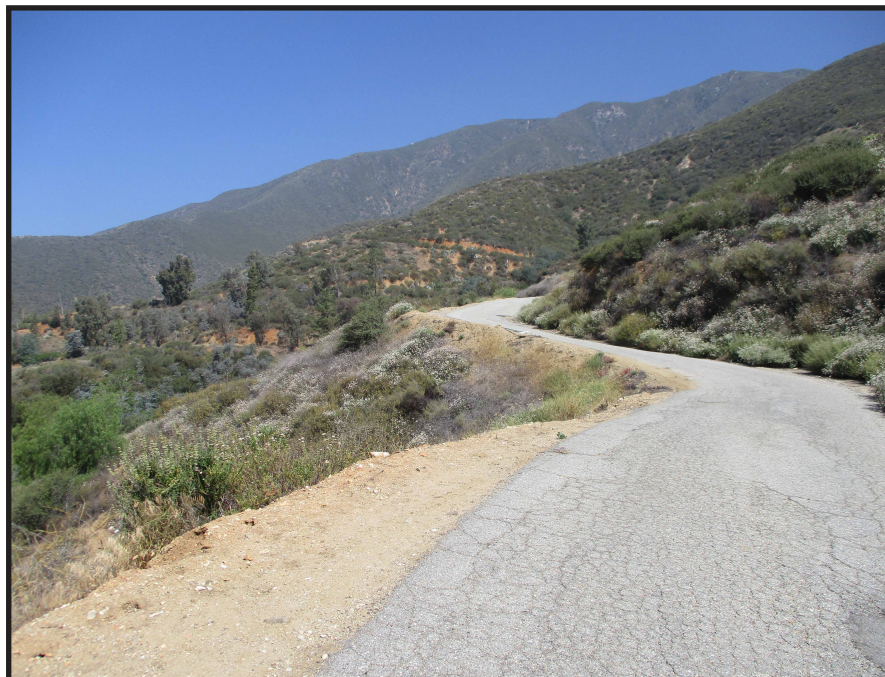
Attachment C - Current Study Area Photographs

*Coastal California Gnatcatcher Focused Surveys
Snow Drop Road Improvements Project*





PHOTOGRAPH 3 - Westward view of the eastern reach of Snow Drop Road. The road is bordered by coastal sage scrub and individual coast live oak trees near drainage crossings.



PHOTOGRAPH 4 - Westward view of western reach of Snow Drop Road.

Refer to Attachment B for Photographic Key Map

Attachment D - Current Study Area Photographs

*Coastal California Gnatcatcher Focused Surveys
Snow Drop Road Improvements Project*





PHOTOGRAPH 5 - Westward view of Snow Drop Road near the intersection of Archibald Road.



PHOTOGRAPH 6 - Northward view of Archibald Road adjacent to the southwest Study Area boundary.

Refer to Attachment B for Photographic Key Map



Study Area (Unincorporated San Bernardino County)

Attachment F - Coastal California Gnatcatcher Occurrence Map

*Coastal California Gnatcatcher Focused Surveys
Snow Drop Road Improvements Project*

