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Mary-Beth Woulfe
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Carlsbad Field Office
2730 Loker Avenue West
Carlsbad, California 92008

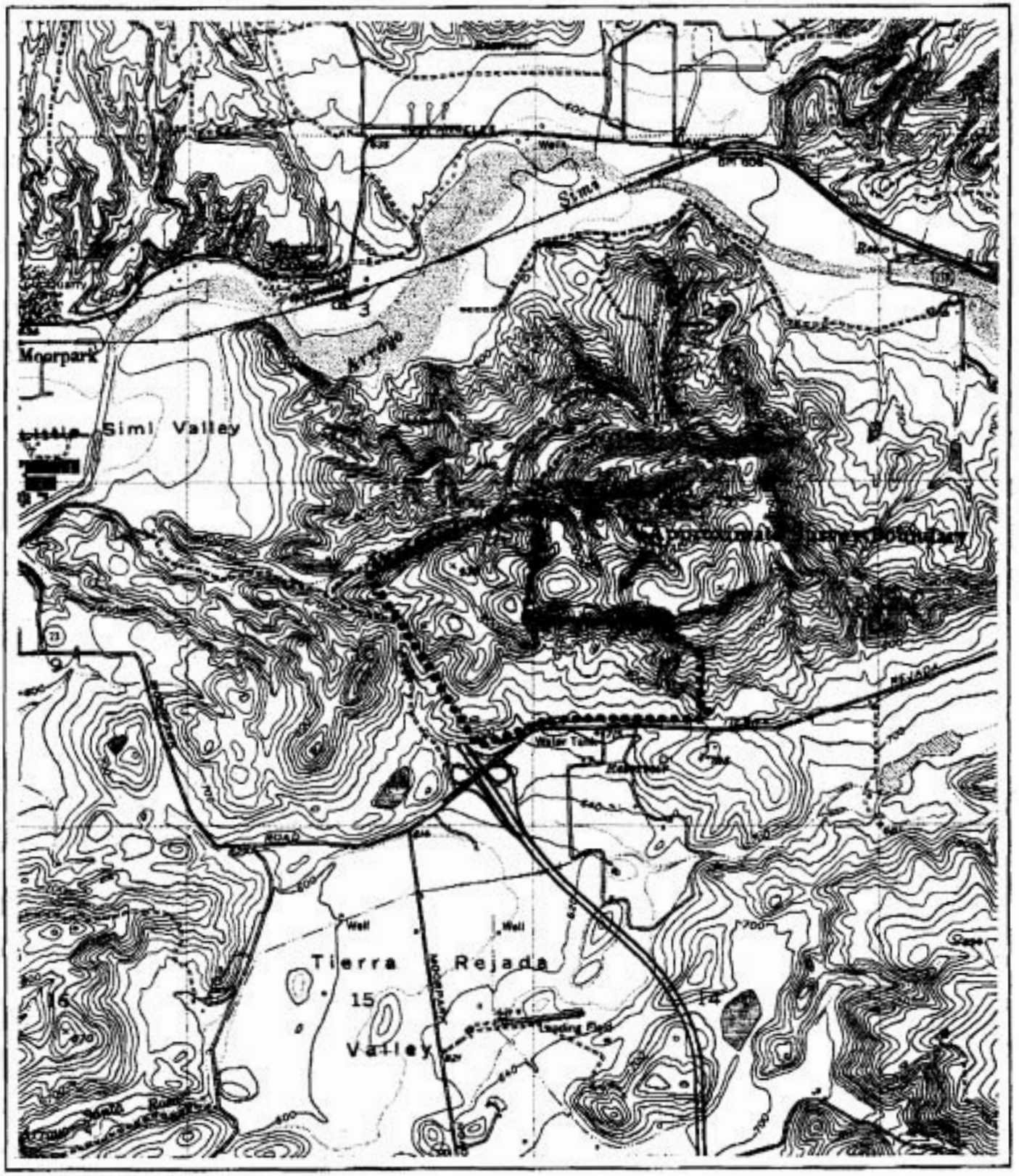
Subject: Submittal Requirement For Coastal California Gnatcatcher Surveys

Dear Ms. Woulfe:

This letter report summarizes the methodology and findings of surveys for the federally-listed threatened coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) conducted by Impact Sciences, Inc. in Ventura County, California. The surveys were conducted to determine the presence and distribution (if present) of the California gnatcatcher within the study area. A regional (1:24,000 scale) survey area location map (Exhibit 1) and a site specific (1:200 scale) map (Exhibit 2-attached) are enclosed to provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) with specific gnatcatcher survey locality information.

SURVEY LOCATION

Impact Sciences was retained to conduct California gnatcatcher surveys on an approximately 185 acre project site that supports approximately 80-90 acres of coastal sage scrub habitat located in Ventura County, California. The survey location (study area) is legally defined as T2N, R19W, comprising part of Sections 10 and 11 which are located on the Simi Valley West, California U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute quadrangle map (Exhibit 1). The survey area is located approximately 1.5 miles southeast of the community of Moorpark, California, northeast of the Tierra Rejada Road/Highway 23 intersection. The western boundary of the survey area is located adjacent to Highway 23. Areas located to the north and west of the survey area are currently under various phases of development. The survey area is dominated by a predominately east-west trending ridgeline with numerous side ridges and drainages. Elevation in the survey area range from approximately 700 feet to 932 feet above mean sea level (MSL).



Source: USGS7.5MinuteSimiValleyWestQuadrangle

EXHIBIT 1

Regional Location

240-01-6/97

PLANT COMMUNITIES

Cultivated Grassland

A large flat area located parallel to Tierra Rejada Road (southern portion of the site) is covered with planted or cultivated grasses, dominated by Bermuda Grass (*Cynodon dactylon*). Scattered non-native trees such as Peruvian pepper tree (*Schinus molle*) and gum tree (*Eucalyptus* spp.) are also present in this area; the latter species is present along the fences bordering the study area as well. Other less dominant species include black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*), prickly lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*), and horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*).

Non-native Grassland

Most of the gently sloping terrain, tops of ridges and hills, and spurs are covered with introduced annual grasses. This community also occurs at the base of the hilly terrain in the study area. Dominant grasses present on site include wild oat (*Avena fatua*), slender wild oat (*Avena barbata*), foxtail chess (*Bromus madritensis* ssp. *rubens*), and brome grass (*Bromus hordeaceus*). Other dominant species include tarplant (*Hemizonia fasciculata*), black mustard, tocalote (*Centaurea melitensis*), horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*), and Vulpia (*Vulpia myuros* var. *hirsuta*).

Venturan Coastal Sage Scrub

The on-site coastal sage scrub community intergrades in species composition with other more inland scrub communities, such as Riversidian sage scrub. It contains low growing, soft-woody shrubs up to 1.5 m tall, and is not as dense as typical chaparral or other coastal scrub communities. This community is present on most of the dry slopes on hilly terrain, and also on the tops of ridges and knolls where rockier soils are more prevalent. Species composition varies depending on slopes and exposures, so that different species associations are dominant in different locations. These species associations correspond approximately with the black sage, purple sage, and California encelia series identified in Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf (1995). North and northeast facing slopes have more purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*) and California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*). West, south, and southwest facing slopes have more

California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), prickly-pear (*Opuntia littoralis*), Encelia (*Encelia californica*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), California sagebrush, and bush mallow (*Malacothamnus fasciculatus*). Scattered shrubs and trees of blue elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*) and lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*) also occur in the coastal sage scrub, with Leymus (*Leymus condensatus*) scattered on some northeast facing slopes and in washes. Several large mature trees of coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia* var. *agrifolia*) occur in the northern part of the study area, scattered on north facing slopes. In nearly all the sage scrub areas, in addition to introduced annual grasses in the understory, patches of foothill needlegrass (*Nassella lepida*) and purple needlegrass (*Nassella pulchra*) occur frequently. Scattered coastal sage scrub plant species are also present in many areas that support non-native grassland habitat.

METHODOLOGY

USFWS guidelines in effect during performance of the surveys (February 28, 1997) stipulated that three gnatcatcher surveys shall be conducted at least one week apart between February 15 through August 30 in those areas participating in the Natural Communities Conservation Plan (NCCP) interim section 4(d) process. For other jurisdictions (non-NCCP areas) a minimum of six surveys shall be conducted at least one week apart between March 15 through June 30, and from July 1 through March 14, a minimum of nine surveys shall be conducted at least two weeks apart. Surveys should be completed between 6:00 a.m. and 12 p.m. Surveys shall avoid periods of inclement weather or excessive heat, rain, wind, and fog. Rate of coverage should be no more than 100 acres per day within NCCP's and no more than 80 acres per day in all other jurisdictions. As such, six protocol surveys were conducted based on our understanding that the project site is located outside a NCCP planning area and that the seasonal timing of the surveys require six separate visits. Coastal California gnatcatchers are year-round residents of coastal sage scrub. However, detectability of this species varies during the year.

Based on the aforementioned guidelines, six protocol gnatcatcher surveys were conducted within potentially suitable on-site coastal sage scrub habitats with at least a seven-day interval between site visits. Field surveys were performed by Scott D. Cameron under the authority of federal permit number PRT-808242. Mr. David G. Crawford assisted Mr. Cameron on several of the site visits. Mr. Cameron has extensive experience conducting California gnatcatcher surveys in Southern California.

Surveys were conducted on May 4, May 21, May 29, June 7, June 20, and June 27, 1997. An additional site visit was conducted on July 17, 1997. Each survey covered areas supporting coastal sage scrub communities considered potentially suitable for gnatcatcher habitation. Approximately 80-90 acres of sage scrub habitat was surveyed per biologist each day. All potential habitat areas were systematically surveyed on foot by walking slowly and methodically along pre-determined transect routes. The location of each transect and survey points along the transect were based on the vegetation and topographic conditions (size, location, and shape of habitat) of the area to be surveyed to ensure complete sage scrub coverage (to the extent practical). Calling points were separated by approximately 200-feet intervals, or as needed, depending upon the vegetation and topography in each area. A combination of taped vocalizations (played at 30-60 second increments) and "pishing" sounds were used at each calling point.

Weather conditions during the surveys were generally conducive to a high level of bird activity. Because of the overall moderate air temperatures and generally calm, clear skies, gnatcatcher surveys were conducted each day from about 7:00 a.m. until approximately 12:00 p.m. Temperatures varied from approximately 65 degrees F at the beginning of each survey day to a maximum of about 80 degrees F at the end of each survey day. Temperatures averaged approximately 75 degrees throughout the survey period. Wind speed ranged from 0 to 10 m.p.h. during the surveys, averaging between 0 to 5 m.p.h. over the survey period. Cloud cover varied from clear to overcast. However, cloud cover typically "burned-off" by mid-morning.

RESULTS

No coastal California gnatcatchers were recorded on the project site during the focused protocol surveys conducted by Impact Sciences in May, June, and July 1997. In addition, no brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) were recorded during the surveys.

Should you have any questions regarding the methodology or findings in this report, please do not hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

IMPACT SCIENCES, INC.

Scott Cameron
Senior Biologist