



October 1, 2015
(20807)

Stacey Love
Recovery Permit Coordination
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
2177 Salk Avenue, Suite 250
Carlsbad, CA 92008

SUBJECT: 2015 FOCUSED SURVEY REPORT FOR COASTAL CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER ALONG AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE OF SAN DIEGO GAS & ELECTRIC COMPANY'S SYCAMORE TO PEÑASQUITOS 230 KILOVOLT TRANSMISSION LINE PROJECT

Dear Ms. Love:

Chambers Group, Inc. (Chambers Group) biologists conducted focused surveys for coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*, CAGN) during the breeding season of 2015 for the proposed alternative route for the San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E) Sycamore to Peñasquitos (SX to PQ) 230 Kilovolt Transmission Line Project (proposed Project) located in the City of San Diego, San Diego County, California. The results of the surveys are presented in this letter report.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As part of the Partial 69kV Underground Alternative proposed by the CPUC, SDG&E prepared preliminary engineering for underground 69kV power line alignment that would connect the existing overhead 69kV power line alignment to the Peñasquitos Substation, mostly within Carmel Mountain Road. The purpose of the surveys summarized herein was to determine the presence or absence of CAGN within and adjacent to areas proposed for an alternative underground route for the SX to PQ Project. Proposed work would include undergrounding of approximately 2.6 miles of new power line.

SURVEY LOCATION

The proposed Project site is located within the United States Geological Survey (USGS) *Escondido* and *Del Mar* Quadrangle maps, Section 27, 28, 29, and 32, Township 14, Range 03W, along Carmel Mountain Road, from Ocean Air Drive to just east of Gallop Crest Court. Elevation at the proposed Project ranges from 700 to 850 feet above mean sea level (amsl) and consists primarily of native vegetation, with a small amount of disturbed habitat intermixed. A map of the survey area is provided in Attachment 1.

COASTAL CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER NATURAL HISTORY

The CAGN is a federally threatened subspecies of California gnatcatcher and a California Species of Special Concern. The range of this species extends from southern California west of the Peninsular and Transverse ranges south into northwestern Baja California, Mexico. The CAGN has a short and slender bill, a tail that is mostly black with white edges, grayish plumage overall, a back and wings that are gray with brown tinge,

and a white eye ring. Breeding males have a black cap. It is a permanent resident of Diegan, Riversidian, and Venturan sage scrub sub-associations found from sea level to 2,500 feet in elevation. This species lives and breeds within California sagebrush dominant habitats and also occurs in mixed scrub habitats with lesser percentages of this favored shrub (Atwood and Bontrager 2001). The largest threat to the species is a loss of habitat. Other threats include wildfires and nest parasitism.

METHODS

Suitable habitat was determined through desktop analysis of aerial imagery of the Proposed Project site prior to conducting the field surveys. Polygons of potential habitat were mapped based off aerial imagery, and were refined during the initial survey based on the boundaries of suitable habitat determined in the field. Focused surveys were conducted within habitat that was determined to be suitable for CAGN by the surveying biologist in 2015 (Attachment 2).

Three breeding season CAGN surveys were conducted by United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)-permitted biologist Heather Franklin (TE 53787B-0). Survey methodology followed current protocol (USFWS 1997) for Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) areas, and the conditions of the 10(a)(1)(A) species recovery permit. Each survey was conducted during favorable weather conditions to maximize detection probability.

All surveys were conducted on foot by looking and listening for the target species in all suitable coastal sage scrub habitat within the survey area and a 300-foot buffer (Attachment 2). No more than 32 hectares (80 acres) of suitable habitat were surveyed during any single survey day.

Observations of the songs, scolds, whisper calls, flight patterns, behaviors, and plumage characteristics were used in conjunction to ascertain presence/absence of CAGN. The biologist conducted the surveys from optimal stationary locations to see and hear the target species without harming any other wildlife species in the area.

The permitted biologist used prerecorded CAGN vocalizations to elicit CAGN within and/or adjacent to all suitable habitat. After a brief and silent acclimation period of one to two minutes, H. Franklin broadcasted the prerecorded CAGN vocalizations at least once at each chosen location, mimicking natural vocalization conditions (i.e., broadcast at natural volume occurring for approximately 15 seconds followed by 1 to 2 minutes of silence). Distance between broadcast locations varied from 20 to 30 meters (60 to 100 feet), depending on topographic, vegetative, and other factors. If a CAGN was detected, the taped vocalization broadcast was ceased at that location, and the location, numbers, status, and demographic data of the target species were recorded (Attachment 3; Table 2).

The locations of any detected CAGN, and other sensitive species were documented and mapped, and submitted to California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB). If leg bands were observed, they were noted. All observed wildlife species were recorded for each survey day (Attachment 4).

RESULTS

Vegetation Communities

The survey area is within a newly developed residential area with open space areas consisting of upland, riparian, and ruderal communities. The identified suitable habitat for CAGN is presented in Attachment 2.

Approximately 49.1 acres (19.87 hectares) of suitable California Sagebrush – California Buckwheat Scrub habitat for CAGN was present (Attachment 2).

California Sagebrush – California Buckwheat Scrub

California Sagebrush – California Buckwheat Scrub (also known as Coastal Sage Scrub) is an open vegetation community typically dominated by California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*) and California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), where each attains at least 20 percent cover (Holland 1986). This community usually occurs on steep, south-facing slopes with severely drained soils or clays that release stored soil moisture slowly (Sawyer et al. 2009). This community may intergrade with other southern California chaparral communities at higher elevations. In addition to California sagebrush and California buckwheat, other species present within this community include laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*), coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), white sage (*Salvia apiana*), Australian saltbush (*Atriplex semibaccata*), and black sage (*Salvia mellifera*).

Survey Conditions

Survey conditions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Survey Conditions

Date	Surveyor	Time		Temperature*		Wind**		Cloud Cover		Precipitation	
		Start	End	Start	End	Start	End	Start	End	Start	End
06/01/15	Heather Franklin, Corinne Klein	7:00 A.M.	11:00 A.M.	62	70	0-1	0-1	100%	20%	0	0
06/11/15	H. Franklin, C. Klein	7:30 A.M.	11:00 A.M.	67	68	0-1	0-1	100%	100%	0	0
06/22/15	H. Franklin, Paul Morrissey	8:00 A.M.	11:00 A.M.	68	75	1-3	1-3	100%	0%	0	0

*All temperature readings are in Fahrenheit

**All wind readings are in miles per hour

All three surveys resulted in the detection of at least one pair of CAGN within the survey area, with a family group detected during the first two surveys. One pair and two juveniles were observed occupying habitat north of the bridge near Center Heights Dr. (west bridge). An additional pair was observed occupying habitat south of the west bridge. One adult male was observed occupying habitat north of the bridge near Timber Brook Lane (east bridge), and one pair was observed occupying the habitat south of the east bridge. The family group near the west bridge was observed primarily utilizing habitat on an east-facing slope, but was also observed utilizing a patch of riparian habitat for foraging. Continuous observation of the individuals and pairs during each survey ranged from 2.5 to 4 hours. A summary of each survey is as follows:

Survey 01: On June 1, 2015, the survey was conducted from 0700 to 1100 hours. A family group of CAGN was initially detected at approximately 0720 hours foraging together on the east-facing slope to the riparian area, north of the west bridge. The adult pair was observed flying from the top of the slope to the riparian

area on several occasions and bringing food back to the two juveniles. The family group were observed calling to one another several times throughout the observation period. An additional pair of CAGN was observed foraging within the habitat south of the west bridge. One adult male with a full cap and one adult female were observed foraging along both the east and west facing slopes approximately 50 feet south of the bridge. No nest was observed and the pair appeared to be site-selecting for a future nesting site. No nesting material was observed in either individual's bill throughout the observation time. In addition, one adult male was observed approximately 70 feet north of the east bridge. The adult male with a full cap was observed responding to a broadcast call near the bottom of the west facing slope. The male responded with 2 scolding calls and then flew further north into the vegetation along the bottom portion of the west facing slope and was not observed again throughout the remainder of the survey. No additional CAGN were detected.

Survey 02: On June 11, 2015, the survey was conducted from 0730 to 1100 hours. The family group of two adults and two juvenile CAGN observed during Survey 01 remained in the area. The family group was initially observed flying just north of the west bridge along the east facing hillside. The group was then observed flying down to a flat area, sparse of vegetation, just on the north side of the bridge. The family group was observed foraging throughout the duration of the survey. The pair observed on the south side of the west bridge during Survey 01 was not observed during Survey 02. The adult male observed north of the east bridge during Survey 01 was observed for approximately 5 minutes during Survey 02. The adult male was observed at the base of the west facing slope in riparian scrub. The male emerged approximately 375 feet north of the bridge in response to a broadcast call. The male did not call or scold and disappeared into the vegetation. No additional CAGN were detected.

Survey 03: On June 22, 2015, the survey was conducted from 0800 to 1100 hours. The family group of CAGN observed during Surveys 01 and 02 was not observed during Survey 03. No CAGN were observed on the north side of the west bridge. One adult CAGN was observed at 0830 approximately 300 feet south of the west bridge. The adult appeared in response to a broadcast call and appeared to be either an adult female or a juvenile, as no black cap could be visualized. A second vocalization was heard approximately 50 feet south of the bridge at 0845; however, no visualization was obtained. The adult male observed on the north side of the east bridge during Surveys 01 and 02 was not observed during Survey 03. One individual CAGN was observed vocalizing approximately 90 feet south of the east bridge. The individual did not appear to have a black cap, so it is likely it was either an adult female or a juvenile. The individual was observed calling briefly before disappearing in the vegetation mid-slope on the east facing slope. No additional CAGN were detected.

Several CAGN were incidentally observed during least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*, LBVI) focused surveys conducted in 2015 within riparian habitat adjacent to suitable CAGN habitat. CAGN suitable habitat occurred along the east and west facing slopes which bordered the riparian habitat, and south of the riparian habitat. The individuals were observed utilizing both the upland and riparian habitat within the survey area. CAGN were observed during all eight of the focused LBVI surveys. One active CAGN nest was incidentally observed during the first LBVI survey and the family group remained in the area for the remaining seven surveys.

Locations of CAGN detected throughout the surveys are included in Table 2.

Table 2. Locations of Sensitive Species Observed

Species	Latitude	Longitude	Comments
CAGN	32.924117	-117.211262	Active nest with 2 nestlings
CAGN	32.923929	-117.211223	Adult pair observed foraging
CAGN	32.923619	-117.211018	2 individuals observed foraging
CAGN	32.923577	-117.210900	Family group of 4 observed foraging
CAGN	32.923454	-117.211006	Adult pair observed, potential nest building
CAGN	32.922971	-117.210881	2 individuals observed foraging
CAGN	32.922884	-117.209996	Adult pair observed foraging
CAGN	32.922491	-117.210025	Adult male observed
CAGN	32.929757	-117.190936	Adult male observed
CAGN	32.929052	-117.190262	Adult male observed
CAGN	32.928368	-117.190675	2 vocalizations heard
CAGN	32.928069	-117.190456	Pair heard vocalizing back and forth


CONCLUSIONS

Based on behavioral observations over the three surveys, it is likely that up to three pairs of CAGN are currently occupying suitable habitat within the survey area: one pair north of the east bridge; one pair north of the west bridge; and one pair south of the west bridge. The attached map (Attachment 3) describes suitable CAGN occupied habitat observed during the surveys as well as currently unoccupied habitat patches occurring within the survey area.

Please contact me at (949) 261-5414 ext. 7232 if you have any questions or concerns regarding these results.

Sincerely,

CHAMBERS GROUP, INC.



Heather Franklin
Staff Biologist

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Survey Location

Attachment 2 – Suitable Habitat

Attachment 3 – Survey Results

Attachment 4 – Wildlife Species Observed

REFERENCES

Atwood, J L. and D R. Bontrager

- 2001 California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/574>

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)

- 2015 California Natural Diversity Database, Rarefind 4. Biogeographic Data Branch, Sacramento, CA.

Sawyer, J.O., Jr., T. Keeler-Wolf, and J. Evens

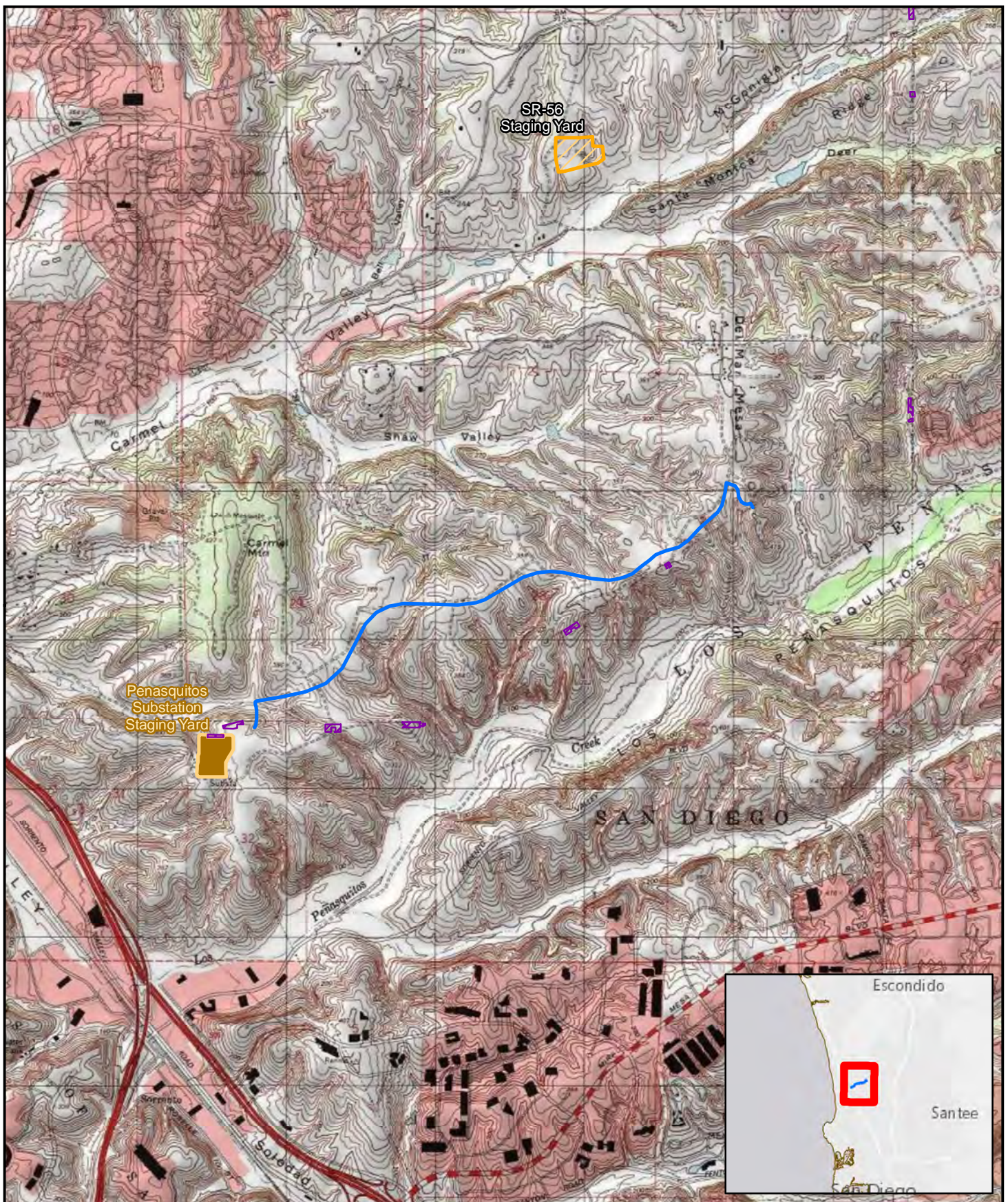
- 2009 *A Manual of California Vegetation, Second Edition*. California Native Plant Society. Sacramento, California.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

- 1997 *California gnatcatcher Survey Guidelines*. Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office.

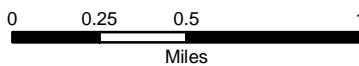
ATTACHMENT 1 – SURVEY LOCATION





Legend

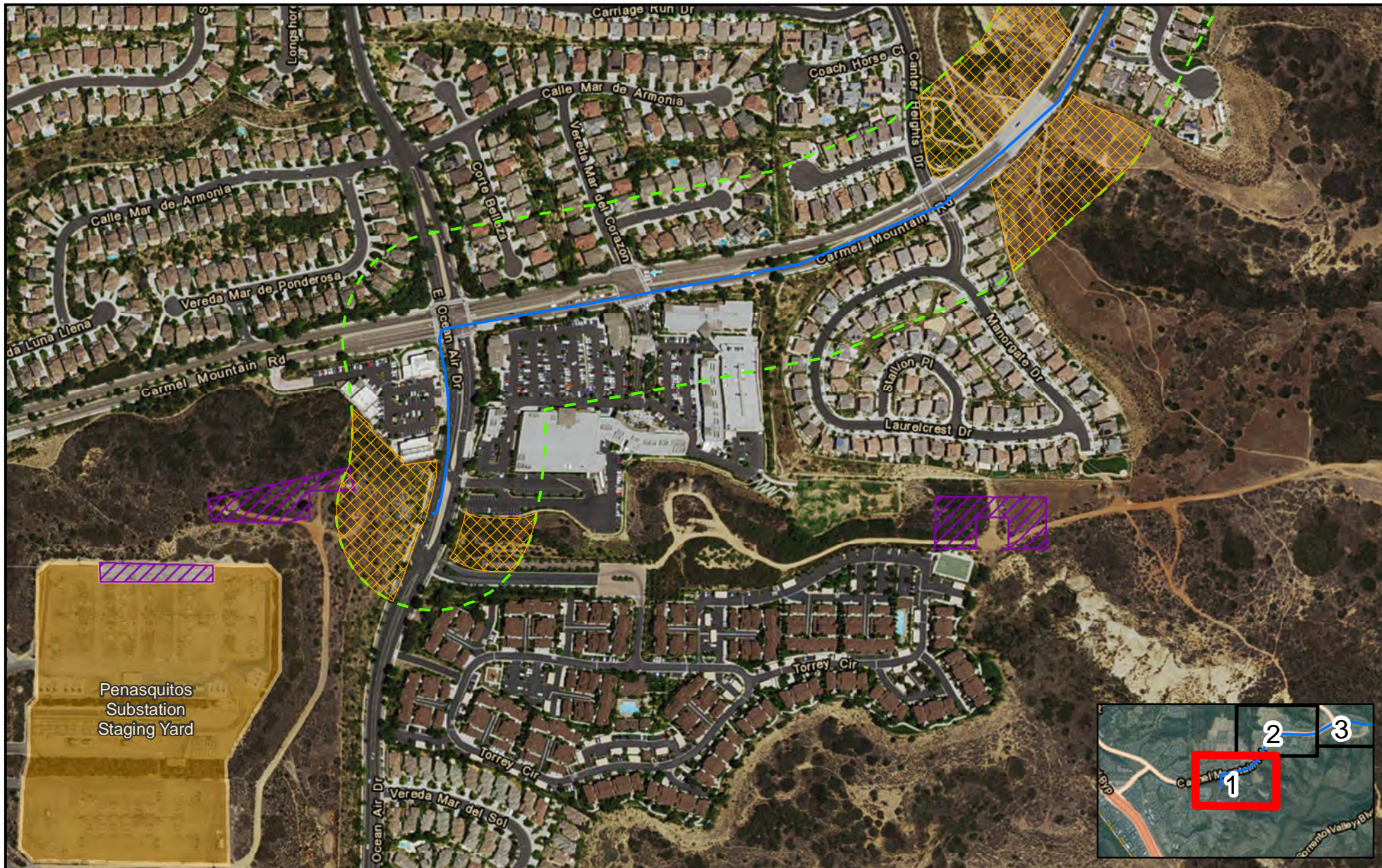
- Project Alignment
- Staging Yards
- Stringing Sites
- Substations



Attachment 1
Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
Project Location Map

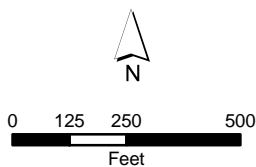
ATTACHMENT 2 – SUITABLE HABITAT





Legend

- Project Alignment
- - - 300-foot Survey Area
- ▨ Potentially Suitable CAGN Habitat
- ▨ Stringing Sites

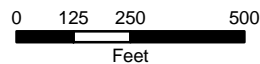


Attachment 2
Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
California Gnatcatcher Suitable Habitat



Legend

- Project Alignment
- - - 300-foot Survey Area
- Potentially Suitable CAGN Habitat



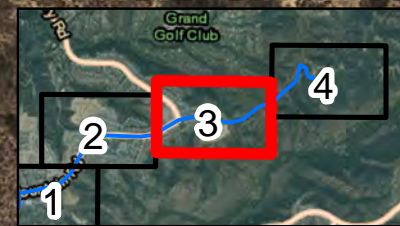
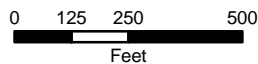
Attachment 2

Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
California Gnatcatcher Suitable Habitat



Legend

- Project Alignment
- - - 300-foot Survey Area
- Potentially Suitable CAGN Habitat
- Stringing Sites

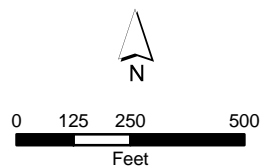


Attachment 2
 Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
 California Gnatcatcher Suitable Habitat



Legend

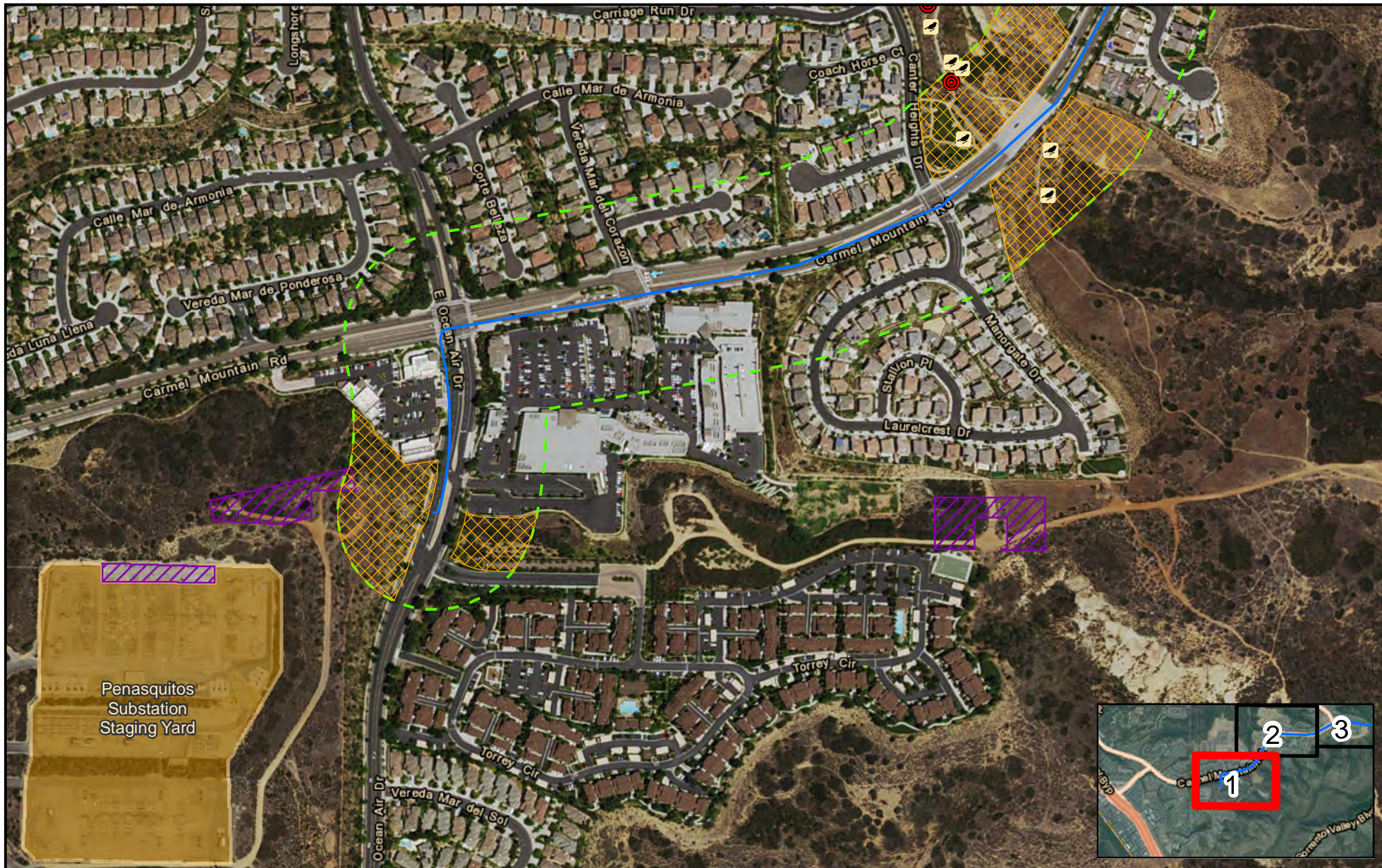
- Project Alignment
- - - 300-foot Survey Area
- Potentially Suitable CAGN Habitat



Attachment 2
 Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
 California Gnatcatcher Suitable Habitat

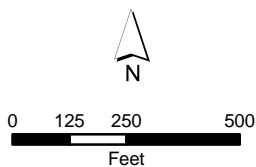
ATTACHMENT 3 – SURVEY RESULTS





Legend

- Project Alignment
- - - 300-foot Survey Area
- Potentially Suitable CAGN Habitat
- Stringing Sites
- California Gnatcatcher Observation
- California Gnatcatcher Nest

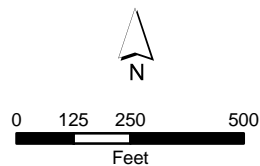


Attachment 3
Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
California Gnatcatcher 2015 Survey Results

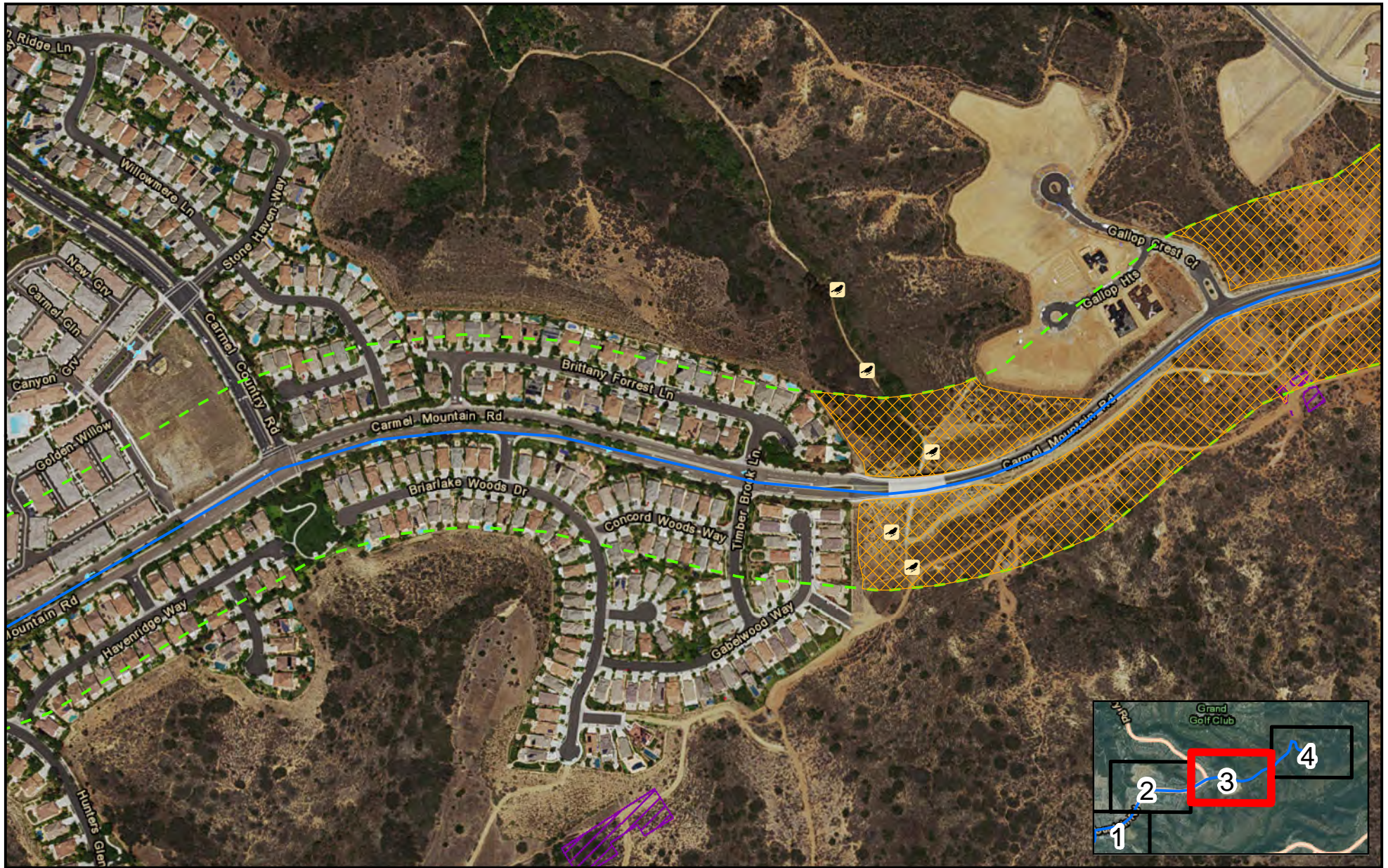


Legend






- Project Alignment
- - - 300-foot Survey Area
- Potentially Suitable CAGN Habitat
- California Gnatcatcher Nest
- 🐦 California Gnatcatcher Observation

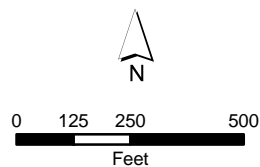


Attachment 3
Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
California Gnatcatcher 2015 Survey Results



Legend




-  Project Alignment
-  300-foot Survey Area
-  Potentially Suitable CAGN Habitat
-  Stringing Sites
-  California Gnatcatcher Observation

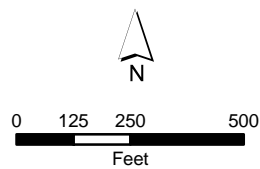


Attachment 3
 Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
 California Gnatcatcher 2015 Survey Results



Legend

-  Project Alignment
-  300-foot Survey Area
-  Potentially Suitable CAGN Habitat



Attachment 3
 Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
 California Gnatcatcher 2015 Survey Results

ATTACHMENT 4 – WILDLIFE SPECIES OBSERVED



Attachment 4 – Wildlife Species Observed

Scientific Name	Common Name
CLASS REPTILIA	REPTILES
PHRYNOSOMATIDAE <i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i> <i>Uta stansburiana</i>	ZEBRA-TAILED, EARLESS, FRINGE-TOED, SPINY, TREE, SIDE-BLOTCHED, AND HORNED LIZARDS western fence lizard side-blotched lizard
CROTALIDAE <i>Crotalus helleri</i>	PIT VIPERS southern pacific rattlesnake
CLASS AVES	BIRDS
ARDEIDAE <i>Ardea herodias</i>	HERONS, BITTERNs great blue heron
ACCIPITRIDAE <i>Accipiter striatus</i> <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	HAWKS, KITES, EAGLES sharp-shinned hawk red-tailed hawk
FALCONIDAE <i>Falco sparverius</i>	FALCONS American kestrel
ODONTOPHORIDAE <i>Callipepla californica</i>	NEW WORLD QUAIL California quail
COLUMBIDAE <i>Zenaida macroura</i>	PIGEONS & DOVES mourning dove
APODIDAE <i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>	SWIFTS white-throated swift
TROCHILIDAE <i>Calypte anna</i> <i>Selasphorus sasin</i>	HUMMINGBIRDS Anna's hummingbird Allen's hummingbird
PICIDAE <i>Picoides nuttallii</i>	WOODPECKERS Nuttall's woodpecker
TYRANNIDAE <i>Empidonax difficilis</i> <i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i> <i>Tyrannus verticalis</i> <i>Tyrannus vociferans</i>	TYRANT FLYCATCHERS Pacific-slope flycatcher ash-throated flycatcher western kingbird Cassin's kingbird
HIRUNDINIDAE <i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	SWALLOWS northern rough-winged swallow
CORVIDAE <i>Aphelocoma californica</i> <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i> <i>Corvus corax</i>	JAYS & CROWS Western scrub-jay American crow common raven
AEGITHALIDAE	BUSHTITS

Results of the 2015 Focused Surveys for California gnatcatcher
for the Sycamore to Penasquitos 230 Kilovolt Transmission Line Project
San Diego County, California

Scientific Name	Common Name
<i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>	bushtit
TROGLODYTIDAE <i>Thryomanes bewickii</i> <i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	WRENS bewick's wren house wren
SYLVIIDAE <i>Chamaea fasciata</i>	OLD WORLD WARBLERS wrentit
POLIOPTILIDAE <i>Polioptila californica</i>	GNATCATCHERS California gnatcatcher
MIMIDAE <i>Mimus polyglottos</i> <i>Toxostoma redivivum</i>	MOCKINGBIRDS, THRASHERS northern mockingbird California thrasher
PTILOGONATIDAE <i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	SILKY-FLYCATCHERS phainopepla
ICTERIDAE <i>Icterus cucullatus</i>	BLACKBIRDS hooded oriole
EMBERIZIDAE <i>Melospiza melodia</i> <i>Melozone crissalis</i> <i>Pipilo maculatus</i> <i>Aimophila ruficeps</i>	EMBERIZIDS song sparrow California towhee spotted towhee rufous-crowned sparrow
FRINGILLIDAE <i>Spinus psaltria</i> <i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>	FINCHES lesser goldfinch house finch
CLASS MAMMALIA	MAMMALS
LEPORIDAE <i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i>	HARES & RABBITS desert cottontail