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Original in Matt Carpenter's
Office



April 23, 2003

Ms. Susan Tebo
Impact Sciences, Inc.
30343 Canwood Street
Suite 210
Agoura Hills, California 91301

Subject: Results of Focused Coastal California Gnatcatcher Surveys; Prospective Water Tank Locations, River Park Project, Los Angeles County, California

Dear Ms. Tebo,

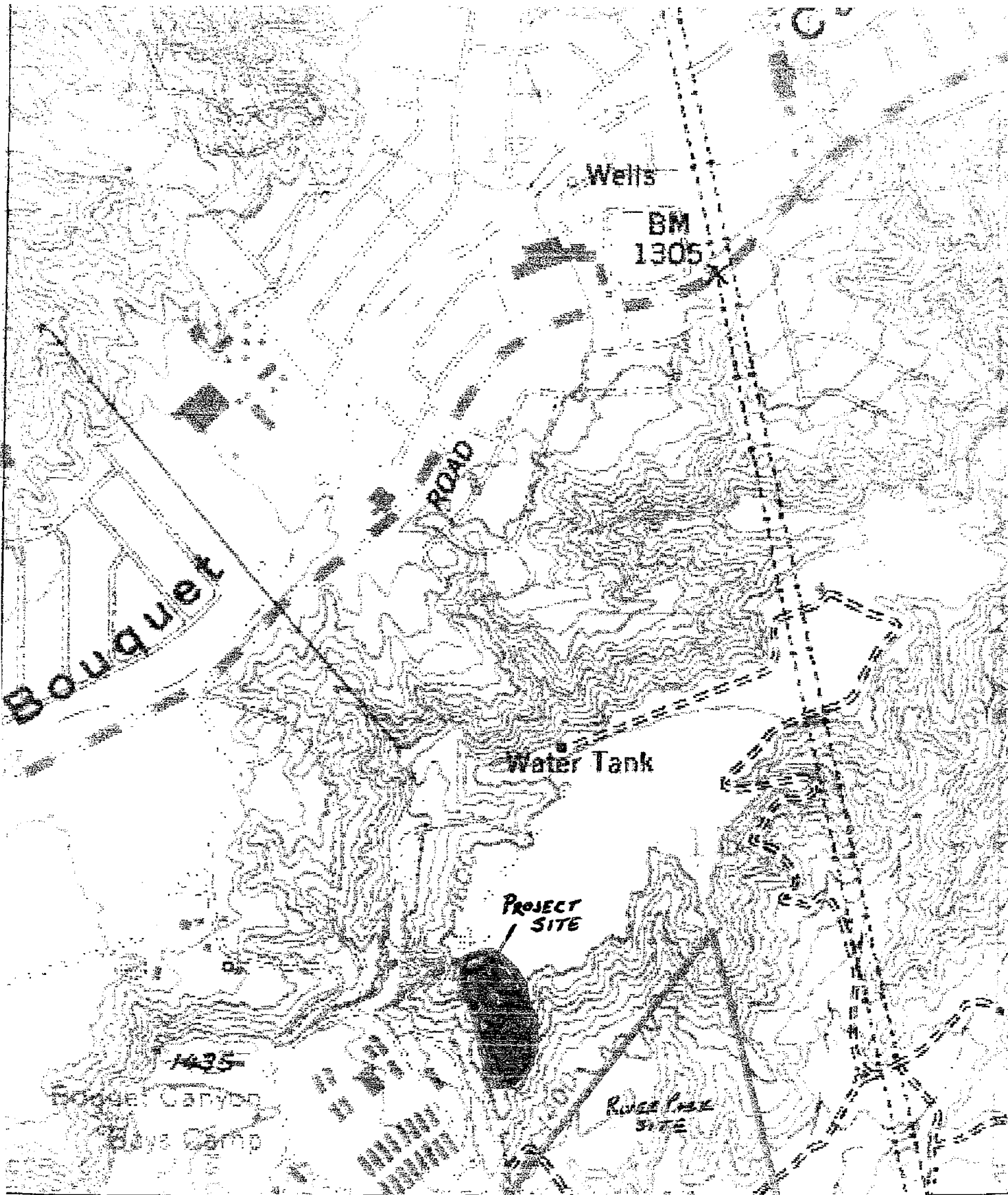
This letter report summarizes the methodology and findings of surveys for the federally-listed Threatened California gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica*) (herein CAGN) conducted by Compliance Biology associated with the River Park project, Santa Clarita, Los Angeles County, California. The surveys were conducted to determine the presence or absence of CAGN within the study area.

SURVEY LOCATION

Compliance Biology was retained to conduct CAGN surveys on a project site totaling approximately two (2) acres. The site consists of two prospective sites for the installation of water storage tanks. The site is located immediately west of Section 13 on the Newhall, California U.S.G.S. 7.5-minute quadrangle maps at T4N, R16W (Exhibit 1). The survey site is located to the immediate east of the Castaic Lake water treatment facility (previously the Bouquet Canyon Boys Camp), south of Bouquet Canyon Road and north of the Santa Clara River. The site is situated near the northeast corner of the proposed River Park project..

With the exception of the water treatment facility to the west, the only other surrounding development is an existing water tank and accessory structures to the north that are associated the treatment plant. Topography of the site includes a hilltop that slopes dramatically downward in all directions. Elevation on the survey site ranges from approximately 1475 feet to 1600 feet above mean sea level (MSL).

• A



Name: NEWHALL
Date: 3/4/2003
Scale: 1 inch equals 800 feet

Location: 034° 26' 16.8" N 118° 30' 41.9" W
Caption: FIGURE 1

Project Location

VEGETATION

The survey site supports two relatively distinct habitat types that coincide with the two proposed water tank locations. The northern half of the site is predominantly a southwest-facing slope that supports non-native grassland with pine trees along the top of the slope and remnant sage scrub along the bottom. Dominant plant species include wild oats (*Avena* sp.), ripgut brome (*Bromus rigidus*), shortpod mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), pine trees (*Pinus* sp.), and California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*).

The southern portion of the site is most accurately described as a hilltop and supports species consistent with a Riversidian sage scrub community. Dominant plant species include California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), thick-leaf yerba santa (*Eriodictyon crassifolium*), purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*), California sagebrush, and chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*). Less dominant species present also include native blue dicks (*Dichelostemma capitatum*), popcorn flower (*Plagiobothrys* sp.), and Our Lord's candle (*Yucca whipplei*). Non-native filaree (*Erodium* sp.) and brome grasses (*Bromus* spp.) were also common as ground cover between shrubs.

There is very little suitable CAGN habitat within the project boundaries as the vegetation has been disturbed, the site is situated on a hilltop that is frequently exposed to winds, and because of noise and human activity associated with the adjacent water treatment facility. However, if it was determined that surveys should still be conducted as CAGN have been identified in the Santa Clarita area and because the site is situated in the vicinity of relatively high quality sage scrub habitat.

METHODOLOGY

Service recommended survey guidelines stipulate 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. Guidelines also recommend that surveys be completed between 6:00 a.m. and 12 p.m.; that they shall avoid periods of inclement weather or excessive heat, rain, wind, and fog; and the rate of coverage should be no more than 80 acres per day per permitted biologist.

Based on the aforementioned guidelines, six focused surveys were conducted within potentially suitable on-site coastal sage scrub habitats with at least a seven-day interval between site visits. All field surveys were performed by David Crawford under the authority of his individual Endangered Species Recovery Permit (# TE-821229-3).

Surveys were conducted on March 14 (authorization was obtained from FWS to begin surveys a day early), 21, and 28 and April 4, 11, and 18, 2003. The entire two-acre site and a surrounding buffer zone were surveyed each day. All potential habitat areas were systematically surveyed on foot by walking slowly and methodically along random transect routes. The location of transects and survey points along each transect were based on the vegetation and topographic conditions (size, location, and shape of habitat) of the area to be surveyed to ensure complete coverage. 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. Surveys were typically conducted between the hours of about 7:00 a.m. and approximately 11:00 a.m. Temperatures varied from approximately 55 degrees Fahrenheit (F) to a maximum of about 77 degrees F. Wind speed ranged from 0 to 15 M.P.H. during the surveys. Cloud cover varied from clear to overcast.

RESULTS

A total of 19 avian species was observed or detected on the subject property. No California gnatcatchers or any other federal or state-listed endangered, threatened, or candidate species were recorded on the project site during the focused protocol surveys. A complete list of all vertebrate species observed or detected during the survey efforts is included as **Attachment A**.

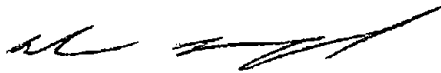
Although none of the individual birds observed are afforded protection under the state or federal endangered species acts, several of the species observed are protected under the federal Migratory Bird Species Treaty Act while actively nesting. As such, grading and/or any other activity resulting in

the removal of vegetation should be conducted outside the typical nesting season (March 1 through July 30). Should such activities be required during this period of time, it is recommended that nesting bird surveys be conducted no greater than 10 days prior to vegetation removal to ensure compliance with federal laws protecting nesting birds.

Further, based on the existing conditions of the two prospective sites, with respect to biological considerations only, the northern site would result in fewer impacts as very little sage scrub habitat would be disturbed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Impact Sciences with biological services. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding the contents of this report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dave Crawford', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Dave Crawford
Principal Biologist

REFERENCES

- California Department of Fish and Game. 2003. "Special Animals (670 taxa)." January 2003 update. Prepared by the Wildlife and habitat Data Analysis Branch. California Natural Diversity Database.
- California Department of Fish and Game. 2003. Natural Diversity Data Base, Rarefind Application. Electronic Reports for the Newhall 7.5-minute quadrangle maps. Dated January 2003. Sacramento, California.
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- Holland, R.F. 1986. "Preliminary Descriptions of the Terrestrial Natural Communities of California." Unpublished Report. State of California, The Resources Agency, Department of Fish and Game, Natural Heritage Division, Sacramento, California.
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- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1997. "Survey Protocol for the Coastal California Gnatcatcher." February 28.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1996. *Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Animal Candidate Review for Listing as Endangered or Threatened Species; Proposed Rule* Federal Register 50, CFR Part 17. U.S. Department of the Interior. Washington, D.C.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1985. *Migratory Bird Treaty Act*. 16 U.S.C. 703-712.

ATTACHEMENT A
Vertebrate Species Observed or Detected

Appendix A
Vertebrate Species Observed or Detected on the River Park
Prospective Water Tank Sites¹

Scientific Name ²	Common Name ²	Status ³
BIRDS		
Accipitridae	Hawks	
<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	Red-tailed hawk	
Phasianidae	Grouse, Pheasants & Quails	
<i>Callipepla californica</i>	California quail	
Trochilidae	Hummingbirds	
<i>Calypte anna</i>	Anna's hummingbird	
Tyrannidae	Tyrant Flycatchers	
<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	Western kingbird	
Hirundinidae	Swallows	
<i>Hirundo pyrrhonota</i>	Cliff swallow	
Corvidae	Jays & Crows	
<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>	Scrub jay	
<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	American crow	
<i>Corvus corax</i>	Common raven	
Aegithalidae	Bushtits	
<i>Psaltiriparus minimus</i>	Bushtit	
Troglodytidae	Wrens	
<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	Bewick's wren	
Mimidae	Thrashers	
<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	Northern mockingbird	
Ptilonotidae	Silky-Flycatchers	
<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	Phainopepla	
Emberizidae	Wood Warblers, Tanagers, Buntings & Blackbirds	
<i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>	Spotted towhee	
<i>Pipilo crissalis</i>	California towhee	
<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	Savannah sparrow	
<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	White-crowned sparrow	
<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>	Western meadowlark	
Fringillidae	Finches	
<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>	House finch	
<i>Carduelis psaltria</i>	Lesser goldfinch	
REPTILES		
<i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i>	Western fence lizard	
<i>Uta stansburiana</i>	Side-blotched lizard	
MAMMALS		
<i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i>	Desert cottontail	
<i>Canis latrans</i>	Coyote	
<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	Mule deer	

KEY:

¹ Occurrences documented during focused CAGN surveys conducted on site from March 14 through April 18, 2003.

² Scientific and common names are from American Ornithologist's Union (2000) for birds, Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (2000) for reptiles, and Jones et al. (1992) for mammals.

³ Status: Sensitivity/listing status by state and federal agencies

* Non-native or introduced species