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Bird

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Ms. Susan Tebo
Impact Sciences, Inc.
30343 Canwood St.
Suite 210
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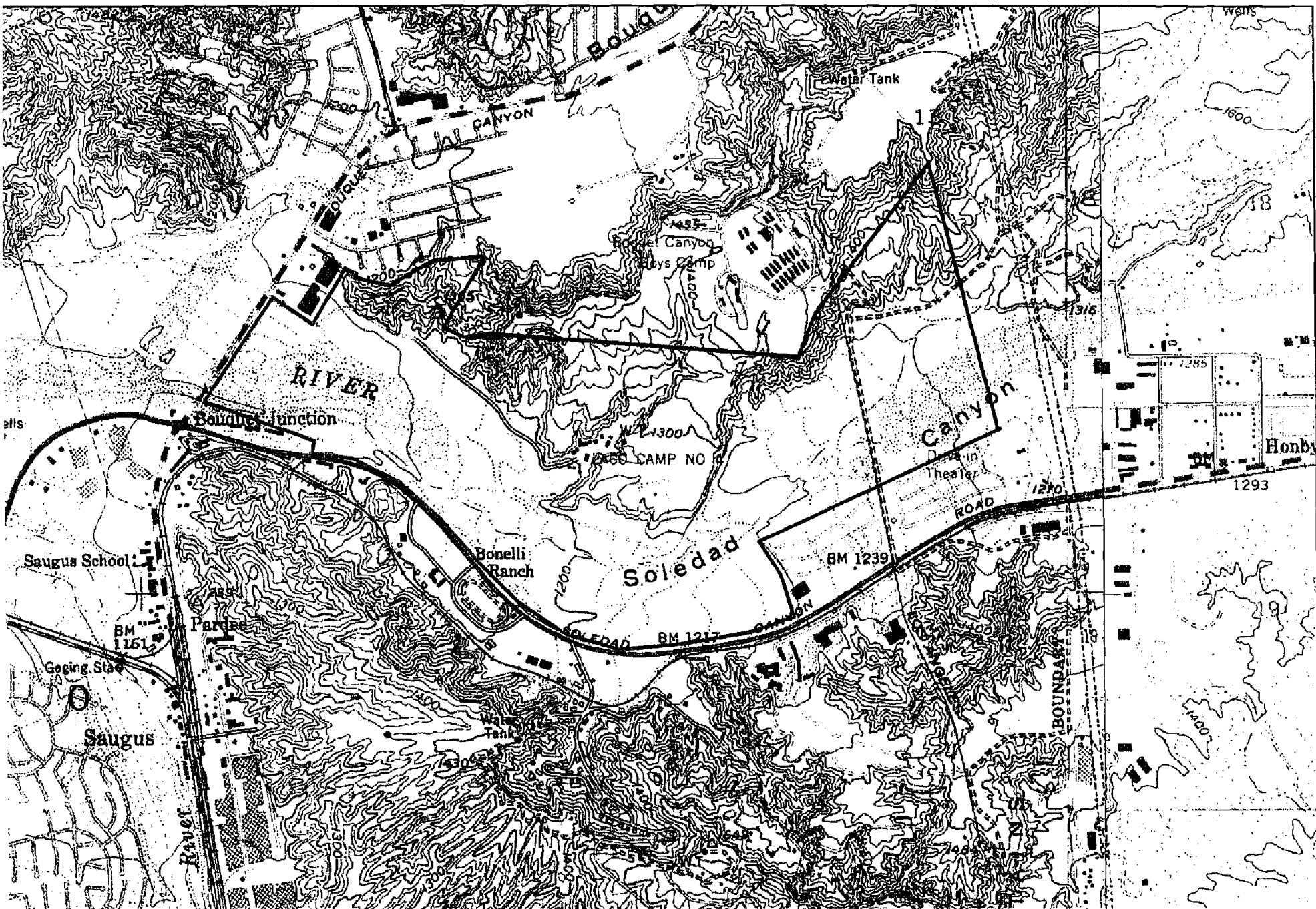
Subject: Results of Focused Surveys for Coastal California Gnatcatcher Surveys; River Park Project. Santa Clarita, Los Angeles County, California.

Dear Ms. Tebo,

This letter report summarizes the methodology and findings of surveys for the federally-listed threatened coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) conducted in Los Angeles County, California by Compliance Biology for Impact Sciences, Inc. The surveys were conducted to determine the presence and distribution (if present) of the species within the River Park study area. A USGS-based survey area location map (Figure 1) is included to provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) with specific survey locality information.

SURVEY LOCATION

Compliance Biology was retained to conduct California gnatcatcher surveys on an approximately 664 acre project site that supports approximately 80 acres of suitable to marginally suitable coastal sage scrub habitat located in Los Angeles County, California. The project site located on the Newhall, California U.S.G.S. 7.5-minute quadrangle map at T4N, R16W, situated west of Sections 18 and 19 (Figure 1). The survey area is located on the north side of Soledad Canyon Road, east of Bouquet Canyon Road. Most of the project site includes a portion of the Santa Clara River and the Los Angeles Aqueduct crosses the river in the eastern portion of the site. The survey area is comprised of variable terrain, ranging from relatively flat riverwash, secondary washes and terrace areas, to previously disturbed flat areas or fields above the banks of the Santa Clara River, to hillslopes in the northern portion of the site. Elevation in the survey area ranges from approximately 1200 feet in the river bed to 1580 feet above mean sea level (MSL) in the northeastern portion of the site.



Name: NEWHALL
 Date: 2/5/2003
 Scale: 1 inch equals 1666 feet

Location: 034° 25' 17.4" N 118° 31' 09.8" W
 Caption: FIGURE 1
 Survey Site Location

PLANT COMMUNITIES

The following provides a summary of some of the plant communities present on the site. Other plant assemblages occur, including cottonwood woodland, willow riparian and riparian scrub. However, these habitats were separated from any suitable gnatcatcher habitats on site and were not included in the gnatcatcher survey area. These riparian areas, associated with the Santa Clara River, have been surveyed separately for special-status riparian bird species by another permitted biologist. The following summaries are taken from the Rare Plant Surveys report prepared by Drs. Anuja Parikh and Nathan Gale that discusses results of surveys conducted on the River Park project site in May 2002.

Riversidian Sage Scrub

This community is the most xeric type of coastal sage scrub south of Point Conception in California (Holland, 1986), and is found along the coastal side of the Transverse and Peninsular Ranges. It supports low, soft-woody shrubs up to 1 m tall. Typical stands are relatively open and dominated by California sagebrush (*Artimisa californica*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), and annual grasses such as foxtail chess (*Bromus madritensis*), each attaining 20 percent or greater cover. On the River Park site, this community occurs on gradual to steeply sloping terrain. The dominant species present is California buckwheat (*E. f.* var. *foliolosum*). Other commonly occurring native species include thistleleaf yerba sanda (*Eriodictyon crassifolium* var. *nigrescens*), California sagebrush, sages (*Salvia mellifera*, *S. apiana*, and *S. leucophylla*), goldenbush (*Ericameria palmeri* var. *pachylepis*), encelias (*Encelia actoni*, *E. californica*), chaparral mallow (*Malacothamnus fasciculatus*), Our Lord's candle (*Yucca whipplei*), linear-leaved stillingia (*Stillingia linearifolia*), California-aster (*Lessingia filaginifolia* var. *filaginifolia*), California broom (*Lotus scoparius*), beavertail cactus (*Opuntia basilaris* var. *basilaris*), giant wild-rye (*Leymus condensatus*), and cotton-thorn (*Tetradymia comosa*). Introduced annual grasses prevalent in the understory are dominated by foxtail chess, and slender wild oat (*Avena barbata*). Native needlegrasses (*Nassella cernua*, *N. lepida*) are also scattered in the understory. Non-native herbaceous species found in this community include shortpod mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), red-stemmed filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*), and tocalote (*Centaurea melitensis*). Native herbaceous species include wishbone bush (*Mirabilis californica*), fascicled tarweed (*Hemizonia fasciculata*), woolly-fruited lomatium (*Lomatium dasycarpum* ssp. *dasycarpum*), malacothrix (*Malacothrix saxatilis* var. *temuifolia*), and chia (*Salvia columbariae*).

Chamise Chaparral

This type of chaparral is found in small scattered patches on flat to sloping terrain, mostly in the northeastern part of the River Park site. Chamise chaparral is the most common type of chaparral in southern California, and is dominated by chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*) shrubs from 1 to 3 m tall. It is typically dense and impenetrable and has a sparse understory (Holland, 1986). It is adapted to repeated fires, and is found on shallow, dry soils on xeric slopes and ridges. Typically, several other native shrub species also occur in this assemblage. However, at the River Park site, the small patches of this community are made up almost exclusively of chamise.

Coastal Sage – Chaparral Scrub

In some areas of the site, on mostly west-facing slopes, a mix of Riversidian sage scrub and chamise chaparral species occur. The overstory is relatively open, and the understory in these areas often includes annual grasses and herbaceous species. Common species in this community include chamise, California buckwheat, California sagebrush, chaparral mallow, and black sage (*S. mellifera*).

Planted Scrub

In the northwestern part of the River Park site, several slopes have been cut or graded for the installation of water lines and concrete-lined drainage channels. These relatively steep slopes have been re-vegetated with native shrubs, primarily California buckwheat. Some California sagebrush also occurs.

Holly-Leaf Cherry Scrub

In the northeastern corner of the site, on relatively flat terrain, a unique stand of holly-leaf cherry scrub occurs. It is situated on the low terraces of a secondary wash that drains to the Santa Clara River. The stand is dominated by relatively large, mature shrubs of holly-leaf cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia* ssp. *ilicifolia*), 3 to 5 m in height. Other shrub associates in this community include skunkbrush (*Rhus trilobata*) and spiny redberry (*Rhamnus crocea*). Other native species found in the understory include woolly star (*Eriastrum densifolium* ssp. *elongatum*), scarlet bugler (*Penstemon centranthifolius*), and linear-leaved stillingia. Also present in this community are lastarriaea (*Lastarriaea coriacea*), valley lessingia (*L. glandulifera* var. *glandulifera*), Mediterranean schismus (*Schismus barbatus*), beavertail cactus, primroses (*Camissonia micrantha*, *C. californica*), and red-stemmed filaree.

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. Further stipulations include that 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; and the rate of coverage should be no more than 80 acres per day per permitted biologist.

Based on the aforementioned guidelines, nine protocol gnatcatcher surveys were conducted within potentially suitable on-site coastal sage scrub, and adjacent scrub habitats, with at least a 14-day interval between site visits. All of the field surveys were performed by David Crawford under the authority of individual federal permit number TE-821229-3.

Surveys were conducted on October 4 and 18, November 1, 15, and 29, December 13 and 27, and January 10 and 24. Each survey covered areas supporting coastal sage scrub communities considered potentially suitable for gnatcatcher habitation. Approximately 80 acres of scrub habitat and immediately adjacent habitats were surveyed each day. All potential habitat areas were systematically surveyed on foot by walking slowly and methodically along varied 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 sage scrub coverage. Calling points were separated by approximately 200-foot 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 varied from cool to very warm and were generally conducive to a high level of bird activity. Because of the temperatures on some of the survey dates were relatively low early morning, surveys on those days were conducted between the hours of about 7:00 to 7:30 and approximately 1:00 p.m. On warmer days, surveys were conducted between the hours of about 6:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Temperatures varied from approximately 52 degrees Fahrenheit (F) to a maximum of about 80 degrees F.

Wind speed ranged from 0 to 15 M.P.H. during the surveys, averaging between 0 to 5 M.P.H. over the survey period. Cloud cover varied from completely overcast to sunny. On most days cloud cover typically "burned-off" by mid-morning.

RESULTS

A total of 46 different bird species were identified on the River Park site during the protocol survey effort. No coastal 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 conducted by Compliance Biology. However, three avian species considered to be state Species of Special Concern and/or federal Species of Concern were observed or detected. A complete list of all vertebrate species observed during the survey efforts is included as **Attachment A**.

A northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) was observed on a single occasion foraging over scrub and riverwash habitats. The hawk was observed soaring over the site for approximately 15 minutes, but did not land. At least two individual Bell's sage sparrow (*Amphispiza belli belli*) were observed in the northeastern portion of the site on two occasions and loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) was observed perching and foraging on six of the nine survey dates. Additionally, though not observed during this survey effort, southern California rufous-crowned sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps canescens*), has been detected in scrub habitat on site during previous biological evaluations.

Additional observations included at least two individual blue-gray gnatcatchers (*Polioptila caerulea*) observed on three occasions. Twice, these birds were observed in the re-vegetated scrub. Also, at least two male brown-headed cowbirds were observed on two occasions. No females were detected.

Please feel free to contact me at the letterhead address/phone if you have any questions regarding the contents of this report.

Sincerely,



Dave Crawford
Permit #TE-821229-3

REFERENCES

- Hickman, J.C. (Editor). 1993. The Jepson Manual, Higher Plants of California. University of California Press, Berkeley, California.
- 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.
- Parikh, Anuja, Ph.D. and Nathan Gale, Ph.D. 2002. Rare Plant Surveys and Vegetation Mapping. River Park Newhall Ranch/Valencia Company Project Sites, Los Angeles County, CA. Prepared for Impact Sciences Inc. May 2002.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1997. Survey Protocol for the Coastal California Gnatcatcher. February 28, 1997.

Attachment A
Vertebrate Species Observed or Detected on the
River Park Project Site¹

Scientific Name ²	Common Name ²	Status ³
BIRDS		
Cathartidae	New World Vultures	
<i>Cathartes aura</i>	Turkey vulture	
Accipitridae	Hawks	
<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Northern harrier	CSC/— (nesting)
<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	Red-shouldered hawk	
<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	Red-tailed hawk	
Falconidae	Falcons	
<i>Falco sparverius</i>	American kestrel	
Phasianidae	Grouse, Pheasants & Quails	
<i>Callipepla californica</i>	California quail	
Charadriidae	Plovers	
<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	Killdeer	
Laridae	Gulls & Terns	
<i>Larus occidentalis</i>	Western gull	
Columbidae	Pigeons & Doves	
<i>Columba livia</i> *	Rock dove	
<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	Mourning dove	
Cuculidae	Cuckoos & Roadrunners	
<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>	Greater roadrunner	
Tytonidae	Barn Owls	
<i>Tyto alba</i>	Barn owl	
Strigidae	True Owls	
<i>Bubo virginianus</i>	Great horned owl	
Trochilidae	Hummingbirds	
<i>Archilochus alexandri</i>	Black-chinned hummingbird	
<i>Calypte anna</i>	Anna's hummingbird	
Picidae	Woodpeckers	
<i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>	Acorn woodpecker	
<i>Picoides pubescens</i>	Downy woodpecker	
<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	Northern flicker	
Tyrannidae	Tyrant Flycatchers	
<i>Contopus sordidulus</i>	Western wood-pewee	
<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	Black phoebe	
<i>Tyrannus vociferans</i>	Cassin's kingbird	
<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	

Attachment A (continued)
Vertebrate Species Observed or Detected on the
River Park Project Site¹

Scientific Name ²	Common Name ²	Status ³
Troglodytidae	Wrens	
<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	Bewick's wren	
Muscicapidae	Kinglets, Gnatcatchers, Thrushes & Babblers	
<i>Regulus calendula</i>	Ruby-crowned kinglet	
<i>Poliophtila caerulea</i>	Blue-gray gnatcatcher	
<i>Chamaea fasciata</i>	Wrentit	
Mimidae	Thrashers	
<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	Northern mockingbird	
<i>Toxostoma redivivum</i>	California thrasher	
Laniidae	Shrikes	
<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	Loggerhead shrike	CSC/[FSC]
Sturnidae	Starlings	
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	European starling	
Emberizidae	Wood Warblers, Tanagers, Buntings & Blackbirds	
<i>Dendroica coronata</i>	Yellow-rumped warbler	
<i>Dendroica nigrescens</i>	Black-throated gray warbler	
<i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>	Spotted towhee	
<i>Pipilo crissalis</i>	California towhee	
<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>	Lark sparrow	
<i>Amphispiza belli belli</i>	Bell's sage sparrow	CSC/[FSC]
<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	White-crowned sparrow	
<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>	Western meadowlark	
<i>Molothrus ater</i>	Brown-headed cowbird	
Fringillidae	Finches	
<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>	House finch	
<i>Carduelis psaltria</i>	Lesser goldfinch	
REPTILES		
Iguanidae	Iguanid Lizards	
<i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i>	Western fence lizard	
<i>Uta stansburiana</i>	Side-blotched lizard	
Anguidae	Alligator Lizards	
<i>Elgaria multicarinata webbia</i>	San Diego alligator lizard	
Colubridae	Colubrid Snakes	
<i>Lampropeltis getulua californiae</i>	California kingsnake	
MAMMALS		
Leporidae	Hares & Rabbits	
<i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i>	Desert cottontail	
<i>Sylvilagus bachmani</i>	Brush rabbit	
Sciuridae	Squirrels	
<i>Spermophilus beecheyi</i>	California ground squirrel	
Geomyidae	Pocket Gophers	
<i>Thomomys bottae</i>	Botta's pocket gopher	
Canidae	Wolves & Foxes	
<i>Canis latrans</i>	Coyote	

Attachment A (continued)
Vertebrate Species Observed or Detected on the
River Park Project Site¹

Scientific Name²	Common Name²	Status³
Mustelidae	Weasels, Skunks & Otters	
<i>Mephitis mephitis</i>	Striped skunk	
Felidae	Cats	
<i>Felis catus</i> *	Domestic (feral) cat	
<i>Lynx rufus</i>	Bobcat	
Cervidae	Deers	
<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	Mule deer	

KEY:

¹ Occurrences documented during focused CAGN surveys conducted on site from October 18 through January 24, 2002.

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

³ Status: CSC = California Species of Special Concern

[FSC] = Federal Species of Concern:

Species denoted with this term primarily include those considered C2 species under the old classification system. This term is only to be used as a "term-of-art" and is not to imply any legal protection or inclusion on the Federal ESA list.

* Non-native or introduced species