

July 14, 2002

Christine Moen  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
2730 Loker Avenue West  
Carlsbad, California 92008

**SUBJECT:** Submittal of the 45-Day Requirement for Surveys of the Coastal California Gnatcatcher at the Canyon Hills Project Site and portions of Adjacent Duke Property, Verdugo Hills, City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California

Dear Ms. Moen:

This letter report summarizes the methodology and findings of presence or absence surveys for the federally-listed threatened coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) conducted by Glenn Lukos Associates, Inc. (GLA) at the above-mentioned project sites. No gnatcatchers were detected during protocol surveys. June 5, 2002 was the final day of survey activities at the Canyon Hills site and Duke Property.

### **SURVEY LOCATION**

The Canyon Hills project site and adjacent Duke Property ("Survey Area") are in the City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California [Exhibit 1]. Together, they comprise approximately 943 acres and contains eight blue-line drainages (as depicted on the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) topographic map Sunland, California [dated 1966 and photorevised in 1988] and Burbank, California [dated 1966 and photorevised in 1972]) [Exhibit 2]. The proposed project on the Canyon Hills site consists of a residential community and an equestrian center.

Protocol surveys for the coastal California gnatcatcher were conducted according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) guidelines in all areas of suitable habitat proposed within or immediately adjacent to the development area or potential roads within the Survey Area.

### **PLANT COMMUNITIES**

The project sites encompasses a total of approximately 943 acres. Areas of suitable habitat that were subject to surveys included coastal sage scrub (CSS), CSS/chaparral ecotone, adjacent non-native ruderal vegetation, and limited areas of willow riparian woodland and coast live oak

(*Quercus agrifolia*) woodlands. A general description of the dominant plant species associated with these communities follows:

### Coastal Sage Scrub

The CSS community on the property is comprised of California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), California brickelbush (*Brickellia californica*), laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), deerweed (*Lotus scoparius*), and white sage (*Salvia apiana*). The understory is often comprised of wild oats (*Avena barbata*), red brome (*Bromus rubens*), long-stemmed buckwheat (*Eriogonum elongatum*), black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), and many other native and non-native species of forbs.

### Chaparral and CSS-Chaparral Ecotone

Dominant chaparral species on site include chamise, hoaryleaf ceanothus (*Ceanothus crassifolius*), laurel sumac, black sage, and scrub oak (*Quercus berberidifolia*).

California sagebrush, black sage, deerweed, and California buckwheat are frequently dominant components of the ecotonal habitats that form a mosaic with dense chaparral vegetation comprised of chamise and hoaryleaf ceanothus.

Post-burn CSS and chaparral habitats are common in several of the survey areas. These areas are often dominated by a dense, scrubby growth of deerweed, morning-glory (*Calystegia macrostegia*), California chicory (*Rafinesquia californica*), and re-sprouting chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*) and California buckwheat. Other components include brome grasses, wild oats, fascicled tarweed (*Hemizonia fasciculata*), black mustard, and California aster (*Lessingia filaginifolia*).

### Oak Woodland

Coast live oak woodlands are best developed on site in canyons and on steep slopes. Deep leaf litter is often present, and there is little understory vegetation. Skunkbrush (*Rhus trilobata*), poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*), and bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*) are a few of the shade-tolerant species associated with the oak woodlands on site. Giant wild rye (*Leymus condensatus*) and black mustard, and morning-glory are common in post-burn oak woodland habitats.

### Willow Riparian Woodland

The larger drainages supports dense canopy trees of arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*), coast live oak, western sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*), and white alder (*Alnus rhombifolia*). The

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understory is frequently comprised of mule fat (*Baccharis salicifolia*), elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*), wild blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*), skunkbrush, and several species of *Juncus* and *Carex*, and the non-native African umbrella sedge (*Cyperus alternifolius*). Indian hemp (*Apocynum cannabinum*) often forms dense, monotypic stands on post-burn stream terraces.

#### Non-Native Ruderal Vegetation

Non-native ruderal vegetation comprises a small portion of the property, and is best developed along roadsides, and on disturbed, highly eroded slopes in the burn areas. These habitats are dominated by red brome, black mustard, tocalote (*Centaurea melitensis*), wild oats, summer mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*), and filaree (*Erodium* spp.). Other non-native and native forbs associated with this community include dove weed (*Eremocarpus setigerus*), and vinegar weed (*Trichostema lanceolatum*).

### **METHODOLOGY**

An initial reconnaissance survey and examination of aerial photography of the Survey Area was conducted to review site access, to qualify vegetation types, and estimate the extant of CSS and CSS/chaparral ecotone habitats potentially suitable for use by the coastal California gnatcatcher. The Survey Area was divided into four habitat survey polygons covering less than 80 acres each [Exhibit 3]. The portion of the Duke Property that was surveyed is delineated within Survey Polygon 4 on Exhibit 3, consisting of a triangular piece comprised of two sides of the Canyon Hills site and the power line right-of-way making the third side.

Protocol surveys for the California gnatcatcher were performed in all suitable CSS and CSS/chaparral habitats identified within the proposed development areas or areas affected by potential roads. Protocol surveys were conducted according to the 1997 guidelines issued by the USFWS, which stipulate that six visits shall be conducted within areas of suitable habitat with at least seven days between site visits when the surveys are conducted during the breeding season. All surveys were conducted during the morning hours and were completed prior to 12:00 P.M. Each biologist per day surveyed no more than 80 acres, and no surveys were conducted during windy (>15 miles per hour), rainy, or extremely hot (>95°F) conditions. The protocol presence/absence surveys conducted within suitable CSS and CSS/chaparral ecotone habitats were performed six times between April 29, 2002 and June 5, 2002. Biologists Tony Bomkamp (TE-825679), Rick Riefner (TE-827494-1), and Jeff Ahrens (PRT-0521590) performed the field surveys. These surveys also covered the adjacent vegetation communities listed above.

All areas were covered on foot by walking slowly and methodically along pre-determined transect routes. The location of each transect was based on vegetation and topographic conditions. The

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presence/absence of the coastal California gnatcatchers was determined by identifying each bird by sight and/or call, using a combination of taped vocalizations and “pishing” sounds. Taped vocalizations were played at intervals of approximately 200 feet, or as needed after observing a patch of CSS for at least 10 – 15 minutes. The use of taped vocalizations was utilized only when necessary to elicit a response from birds, depending on vegetation and topography in each survey polygon.

Weather conditions during the surveys were conducive to a high level of bird activity. Table 1 summarizes survey dates, temperature, and weather conditions recorded during all surveys for the California gnatcatcher.

## **RESULTS**

No coastal California gnatcatchers were detected on either the Canyon Hills site or the adjacent Duke Property. A complete list of birds observed during the project surveys can be found in Appendix A.

Bird species commonly observed on site include wrenit (*Chamaea fasciata*), western scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*), house finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), lesser goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*), bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), Anna’s hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), white-crowned sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*), California towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*), California thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*), western scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*), California quail (*Callipepla californica*), northern flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*), ash-throated flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*), Bewick’s wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*), Costa’s hummingbird (*Calypte costae*), common raven (*Corvus corax*), and spotted towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*).

One brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) was observed in La Tuna Canyon on May 20, 2002.

Mammals observed on the project site include coyote (*Canis latrans*), California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*), desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*), and domestic dog (*Canis familiaris*).



**Table 1. Summary of Survey Dates and Weather Conditions at the Canyon Hills and Duke Properties, City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County**

Date	Survey/ Polygon No.	Start Time	End Time	Surveyor	Temp °F, (start/end)	Windspeed (mi/hr)	Cloud Cover (%, start/end)
4/29/02	1/1	0630	0830	TB	45/58	<0.5	95-sun
4/29/02	½	0700	0945	JA	48/65	0.5-1	95-sun
4/30/02	1/3	0645	0940	TB	57/69	1	70/50-sun
4/30/02	¼	0645	0940	JA	57/69	1	70/50-sun
5/6/02	2/1	0700	0930	RR	62/63	0.5-1	100- overcast
5/6/02	2/2	0700	0910	JA	57/62	0.5-1	100- overcast
5/7/02	2/3	0730	1010	RR	62/68	<0.8	100/60- overcast
5/7/02	2/4	0730	1020	JA	57/66	1	100/75- overcast
5/13/02	3/1	0815	1030	RR	70/85	0.7-2	50/80-sun
5/13/02	3/2	0800	1020	JA	74/88	1	70/65-sun
5/14/02	3/3	0730	1045	JA	68/81	2-3	100-sun
5/14/02	3/4	0920	1150	RR	76/87	2-3.5	100-sun
5/21/02	4/1	0550	0815	RR	48/58	<0.8	90/100-sun
5/20/02	4/2	0645	9:00	JA	64/75	1	100- overcast
5/22/02	4/3	0600	0845	RR	54/70	0.8-1	100-sun
5/21/02	4/4	0630	0905	JA	60/73	0	100-sun
5/28/02	5/1	0720	0945	RR	64/71	0.3-0.8	100-sun
5/28/02	5/2	0722	0935	JA	68/73	0-1	100-sun
5/29/02	5/3	0715	0945	RR	63/76	0-1	100-sun
5/29/02	5/4	0730	0940	JA	75/83	0-1	100-sun
6/4/02	6/1	0645	0830	RR	62/73	<0.5	100-sun
6/4/02	6/2	0630	0815	JA	55/70	1	100-sun
6/5/02	6/3	0630	0845	RR	59/78	<0.5	100-sun
6/5/02	6/4	0600	0752	JA	56/63	0-1	100- overcast

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Should you have any questions regarding the methodology or findings of this report, please call me at (949) 837-0404.

Sincerely,

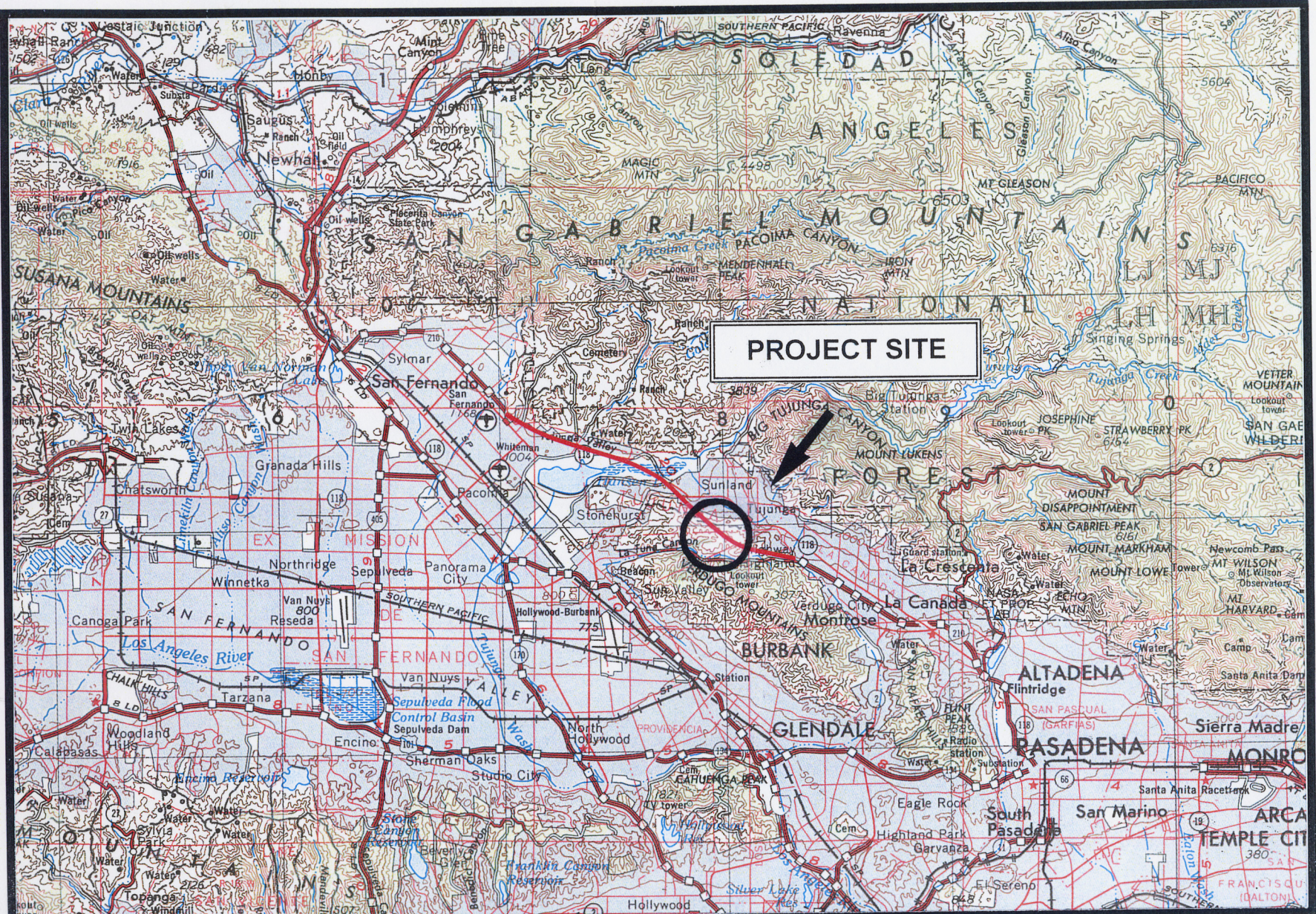
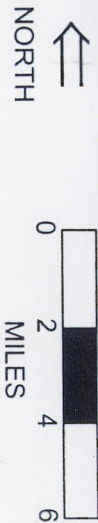
Tony Bomkamp  
Senior Biologist

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Adapted from USGS Los Angeles Quadrangle



**CANYON HILLS**  
Regional Map

GLENN LUKOS ASSOCIATES

EXHIBIT 1

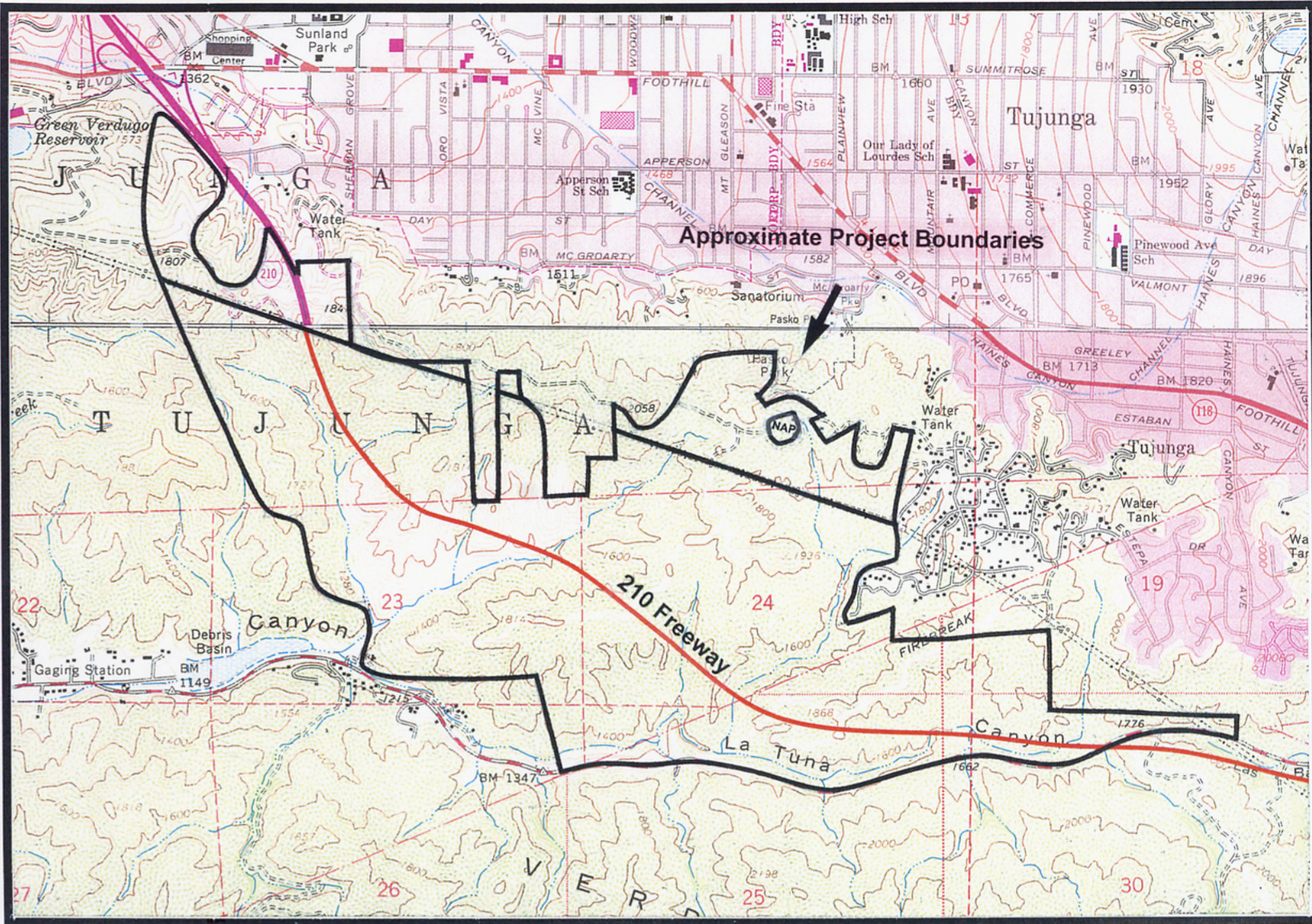




Adapted from USGS Burbank and Sunland Quadrangles

North ↑

0 1000 2000 3000 FEET



**CANYON HILLS**  
Vicinity Map

GLENN LUKOS ASSOCIATES

EXHIBIT 2

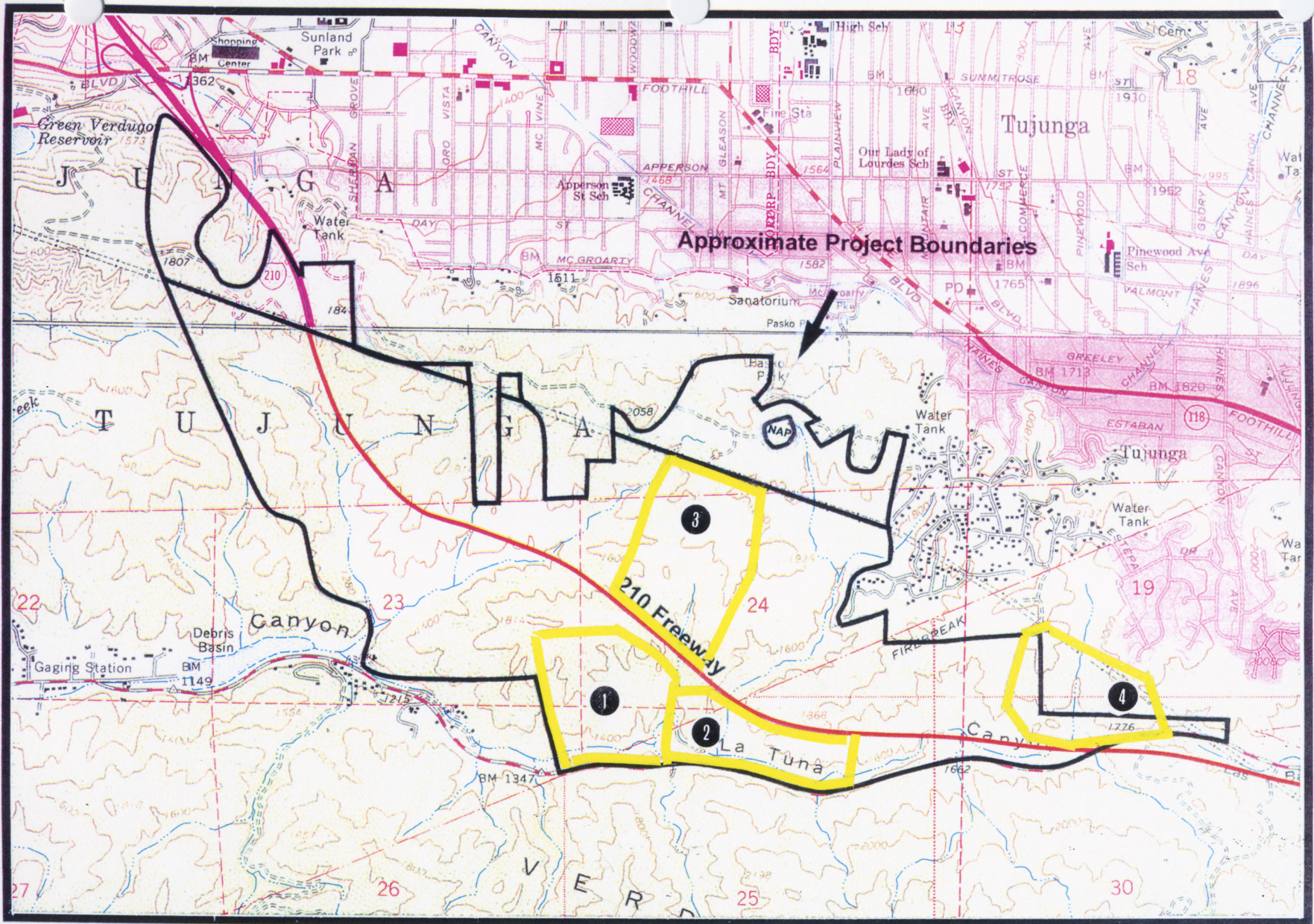




Adapted from USGS Burbank and Sunland Quadrangles

North ↑

0  
1000  
2000  
3000  
FEET



# CANYON HILLS

Gnatcatcher Survey Polygon Locations

GLENN LUKOS ASSOCIATES

EXHIBIT 3





**APPENDIX A**  
**Birds Observed During Surveys**

**ACCIPITERIDAE - HAWKS**

*Buteo jamaicensis*  
red-tailed hawk

**CATHARTIDAE - NEW WORLD VULTURES**

*Cathartes aura*  
turkey vulture

**PHASIANIDAE - PHEASANTS & QUAILS**

*Callipepla californica*  
California quail

**COLUMBIDAE - PIGEONS & DOVES**

*Zenaida macroura*  
mourning dove

**APODIDAE - SWIFTS**

*Chaetura vauxi*  
Vaux's swift  
*Aeronautes saxatalis*  
white-throated swift

**TROCHILIDAE - HUMMINGBIRDS**

*Calypte anna*  
Anna's hummingbird  
*Calypte costae*  
Costa's hummingbird

**PICIDAE - WOODPECKERS**

*Colaptes auratus*  
northern flicker

**TYRANNIDAE - TYRANT  
FLYCATCHERS**

*Sayornis nigricans*

black phoebe

*Tyrannus verticalis*

western kingbird

*Myiarchus cinerascens*

ash-throated flycatcher

**CORVIDAE - JAYS & CROWS**

*Aphelocoma coerulescens*

western scrub-jay

*Corvus brachyrhynchos*

American crow

*Corvus corax*

common raven

**AEGITHALIDAE - BUSHTITS**

*Psaltriparus minimus*

bush tit

**TROGLODYTIDAE - WRENS**

*Thryomanes bewickii*

Bewick's wren

**MUSCICAPIDAE - KINGLETS,  
GNATCATCHERS, THRUSHES &  
BABBLERS**

*Regulus calendula*

ruby-crowned kinglet

*Catharus guttatus*

hermit thrush



*Chamaea fasciata*  
wrentit

**MIMIDAE - THRASHERS**

*Mimus polyglottos*  
northern mockingbird  
*Toxostoma redivivum*  
California thrasher

**PTILOGONATIDAE - SILKY-  
FLYCATCHERS**

*Phainopepla nitens*  
phainopepla

**STURNIDAE - STARLINGS**

*Sturnus vulgaris*  
European starling

**VIREONIDAE - VIREOS**

*Vireo huttoni*  
Hutton's vireo

**PARULIDAE**

*Dendroica coronata*  
yellow-rumped warbler

**EMBERIZIDAE- WOOD WARBLERS,  
SPARROWS, TANAGERS, &  
BUNTINGS**

*Dendroica petechia*  
yellow warbler  
*Wilsonia pusilla*  
Wilson's warbler  
*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*  
spotted towhee  
*Pipilo crissalis*  
California towhee  
*Aimophila ruficeps*  
Rufous-crowned sparrow  
*Chondestes grammacus*  
lark sparrow  
*Melospiza melodia*  
song sparrow  
*Zonotrichia leucophrys*  
white-crowned sparrow

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*Guiraca caerulea*  
blue grosbeak

**CUCULIDAE - CUCKOOS &  
ROADRUNNERS**

*Geococcyx californianus*  
greater roadrunner

**ICTERIDAE – BLACKBIRDS &  
ORIOLES**

*Icterus bullockii*  
Bullock's oriole

**PARIDAE - TITMICE**

*Parus inornatus*  
Plain titmouse

**FRINGILLIDAE - FINCHES**

*Carpodacus mexicanus*  
house finch

*Carduelis psaltria*  
lesser goldfinch