

Appendix D-1

2024-2025 Focused Coastal California Gnatcatcher Survey Report

February 14, 2025

15464

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Attention: Recovery Permit Coordinator
2177 Salk Avenue, No. 250
Carlsbad, California 92008

Subject: 2024–2025 Focused Coastal California Gnatcatcher Survey Report for the Evolve San Diego State Student Housing Project, San Diego, County of San Diego, California

Dear Recovery Permit Coordinator:

This letter report documents the results of nine protocol-level focused surveys for the coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) that were conducted for the Evolve Student Housing Project (project).

The project is located on approximately 10 acres of developed land. However, a large buffer was applied to the project, creating a survey area of approximately 40 acres, due to the coastal sage scrub vegetation surrounding the project. On the western side of the project a 500-foot buffer was applied, on the northern side of the project a 200-foot buffer was applied, on the southern side of the project pavement disallowed a buffer, and on the eastern side of the site a 150-foot buffer was applied. These buffers ended when pavement or housing was reached on all sides. Approximately half of the buffer on each side consisted of moderate quality coastal sage scrub. Some areas of the coastal sage scrub were intermixed with ornamental plantings. The surveys were conducted in areas of suitable coastal California gnatcatcher habitat; however, the entire buffer was surveyed in order to access all coastal sage scrub. The entire buffer was surveyed by Dudek Biologist Erin Bergman (TE-53771B-0) between October 9, 2024 and February 4, 2025, with the assistance of Dudek Biologist Shana Carey.

The coastal California gnatcatcher is a federally listed threatened species and a California Department of Fish and Wildlife Species of Special Concern. It is closely associated with coastal sage scrub habitat and, therefore, threatened primarily by loss, degradation, and fragmentation of this habitat. Coastal California gnatcatchers typically occur below 820 feet above mean sea level and within 22 miles of the coast. Studies have suggested that coastal California gnatcatchers avoid nesting on very steep slopes (greater than 40%) (Bontrager 1991). Coastal California gnatcatchers are also impacted by brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) nest parasitism (Braden et al. 1997).

1 Preserve Location and Existing Conditions

The approximately 10-acre project site (with 30-acre buffer) is located at San Diego State University in San Diego, San Diego County, California (Figure 1, Project Location). All portions of the project site are surrounded by some development adjacent to the buffer. The project site is south of Interstate 8, west of Canyon Crest Drive, east of

Hewlett Drive, and north of Remington Road, within Assessor's Parcel Nos. 4622301900, 4621800900, 4614500900, 4621801000, 4621800100, 4622200100, 4622200200, 4622200300, 4622200400, and 4621300700. However, San Diego State University does not own the College View Estates parcel, and it is not a part of the survey area.

Elevations range from approximately 420 meters above mean sea level to approximately 445 meters above mean sea level. The majority of the project buffer consists of coastal sage scrub habitat and ornamental plantings. Topography of the survey area consists of some flat areas, a few rolling hills, and some extremely steep slopes.

2 Vegetation Communities Suitable for Coastal California Gnatcatcher

One vegetation community was identified within the project buffer as suitable for coastal California gnatcatcher: Diegan coastal sage scrub. Within the project site, developed land is present. No coastal sage scrub occurs within the project site boundary.

2.1 Diegan Coastal Sage Scrub (32500)

Diegan coastal sage scrub (coastal sage scrub) is a native plant community composed of a variety of soft, low, aromatic shrubs, characteristically dominated by drought-deciduous species such as California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), and sages (*Salvia* spp.), with scattered evergreen shrubs, including lemonade berry (*Rhus integrifolia*) and laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*). It typically develops on south-facing slopes and other xeric locations (Holland 1986). Coastal sage scrub is recognized as a sensitive plant community by local, state, and federal resource agencies. It supports a rich diversity of sensitive plants and animals, and it is estimated that it has been reduced by 75% to 80% of its historical coverage throughout Southern California. It is the focus of the current State of California Natural Community Conservation Planning program (Oberbauer et al. 2008).

Within the project buffer, dominant species include California sagebrush, California buckwheat, and black sage (*Salvia mellifera*). Less abundant in the coastal sage scrub was laurel sumac, toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), and short-pod mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*). Some patches of coastal sage scrub were surrounded by scattered ornamental plantings.

3 Methods

Nine focused surveys for coastal California gnatcatcher were performed within suitable habitat, which included the entire buffer, between October 9, 2024, and February 4, 2025, by coastal California gnatcatcher-permitted biologist Erin Bergman (TE-53771B-0) according to the schedule in Table 1. The surveys were conducted following the currently accepted protocol of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Poliioptila californica californica*) Presence/Absence Survey Protocol (USFWS 1997). Coastal California gnatcatchers were

documented if present using a variety of features that help distinguish individuals from one another in order to assist with determining the number of pairs/individuals. Some distinguishing features include male cap color (variation in the darkness of the black cap) and male cap thickness, width, and length. Coastal California gnatcatcher color patterns, unique markings, behaviors, pitch of call, and song variation were used to separate each observation.

Table 1. Survey Details and Conditions

Date	Time	Survey Effort (acres/hour)	Survey Conditions
10/09/2024	6:00 a.m.–12:21 p.m.	7	56°F–70°F; 30%–100% cloud cover; 0–3 mph wind
10/24/2024	6:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	7	60°F–68°F; 20%–30% cloud cover; 0–4 mph wind
11/07/2024	6:00 a.m.–12:06 p.m.	7	60°F–64°F; 10%–50% cloud cover; 0–4 mph wind
11/21/2024	6:00 a.m.–12:02 p.m.	7	50°F–66°F; 0%–30% cloud cover; 0–3 mph wind
12/05/2024	6:00 a.m.–12:05 p.m.	7	55°F–67°F; 90%–100% cloud cover; 0–4 mph wind
12/19/2024	6:00 a.m.–12:09 p.m.	7	65°F–66°F; 10%–30% cloud cover; 0–3 mph wind
01/07/2025	6:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	7	46°F–74°F; 20%–30% cloud cover; 0–5 mph wind
01/21/2025	6:00 a.m.–12:01 p.m.	7	45°F–73°F; 0% cloud cover; 0–4 mph wind
02/04/2025	7:09 a.m.–12:01 p.m.	7	70°F–77°F; 50%–100% cloud cover; 0–6 mph wind

Survey routes for site visits completely covered the areas of suitable coastal California gnatcatcher habitat in the survey area, as shown on Figure 2, Coastal California Gnatcatcher Survey Route. Appropriate birding binoculars (8 × 42) were used to aid in detecting and identifying bird species. A recording of coastal California gnatcatcher vocalizations was used to elicit a response from the species. The recording was played approximately every 50 to 100 feet, and when a coastal California gnatcatcher was detected, the playing of the recording ceased to avoid additional harassment. A 100-scale (1 inch = 100 feet) aerial photograph of the survey area overlaid with the vegetation and site boundaries was used to map any coastal California gnatcatcher detected. Weather conditions, time of day, and season were within protocol limits and appropriate for the detection of gnatcatchers, as shown in Table 1.

4 Results

During the survey efforts, coastal California gnatcatcher observations included one individual and no pairs (Figure 3, Coastal California Gnatcatcher Survey Results). As indicated on Figure 3, the coastal California gnatcatcher was observed on the eastern side of the site and was both audibly observed and visually observed. This observation was on October 24, 2024. This individual was not seen on subsequent visits. This species has been documented in the past in the coastal sage scrub habitat adjacent to Adobe Falls/Alvarado Creek, north of Interstate 8 and north of the proposed project site. It is probable that this habitat north of Interstate 8 remains occupied and individuals only occasionally disperse through the habitat south of Interstate 8 such as the area where the individual was observed along the eastern edge of the project site. It is Dudek’s opinion that the individual observed on October

24, 2024, was utilizing that habitat to disperse as evidenced by the lack of observation of this or other individuals on prior or subsequent visits.

In total, 30 wildlife species were recorded during the survey efforts and are listed in Attachment A. Three non-native wildlife species and 27 native species were observed.

I certify that the information in this survey report and attached exhibits fully and accurately represents my work. Please feel free to contact Erin Bergman at ebergman@dudek.com if you have any questions regarding the contents of this report.

Sincerely,



Erin Bergman

Att: Figure 1 – Project Location
Figure 2 – Coastal California Gnatcatcher Survey Route
Figure 3 – Coastal California Gnatcatcher Survey Results
A – Wildlife Species Observed During the 2024–2025 Evolve San Diego State Housing Project Coastal California Gnatcatcher Surveys
cc: Erin Bergman, Dudek

5 References

- Bontrager, D.R. 1991. *Habitat Requirements, Home Range Requirements, and Breeding Biology of the California Gnatcatcher (Poliophtila californica) in South Orange County, California*. Prepared for Santa Margarita Company, Rancho Santa Margarita, California. April 1991.
- Braden, G.T., R.L. McKernan, and S.M. Powell. 1997. “Effects of Nest Parasitism by the Brown-Headed Cowbird on Nesting Success of the California Gnatcatcher.” *Condor* 99:858–865.
- Holland, R.F. 1986. *Preliminary Descriptions of the Terrestrial Natural Communities of California*. Nongame-Heritage Program, California Department of Fish and Game. October 1986.
- Oberbauer, T., M. Kelly, and J. Buegge. 2008. *Draft Vegetation Communities of San Diego County*. March 2008. Accessed October 2024. https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/pds/ceqa/Soitec-Documents/Final-EIR-Files/references/rcref/ch9.0/rcrefaletters/O14%202014-12-19_OberbauerTM2008.pdf.
- USFWS (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). 1997. “Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica californica*) Presence/Absence Survey Protocol.” Carlsbad, California: USFWS. Revised July 28, 1997. Accessed October 2024. <https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/survey-protocol-for-coastal-california-gnatcatcher.pdf>.

Figures 1-3

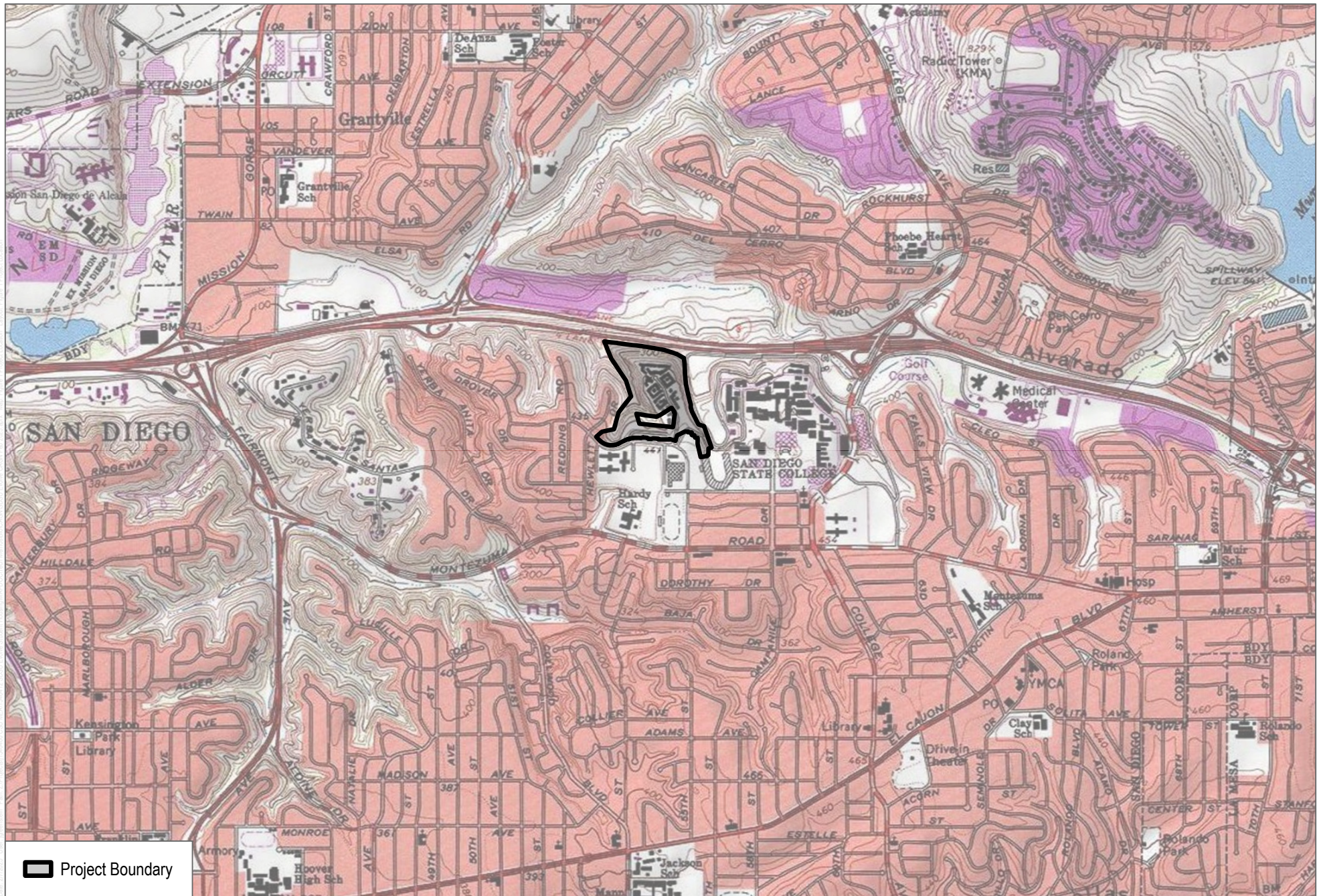


FIGURE 1

Project Location

SDSU Evolve Student Housing Project



SOURCE: SanGIS 2023; Open Street Map 2023

DUDEK



0 150 300
Feet

FIGURE 2

Coastal California Gnatcatcher Survey Route

SDSU Evolve Student Housing Project



SOURCE: SanGIS 2023; Open Street Map 2023

Attachment A

Wildlife Species Observed During the
2024-2025 Evolve San Diego State Student Housing
Project Coastal California Gnatcatcher Surveys

Birds

Bushtits

AEGITHALIDAE — LONG-TAILED TITS AND BUSHTITS

Psaltiriparus minimus — bushtit

Falcons

FALCONIDAE — CARACARAS AND FALCONS

Falco peregrinus anatum — American peregrine falcon

Finches

FRINGILLIDAE — FRINGILLINE AND CARDUELINE FINCHES AND ALLIES

Haemorhous mexicanus — house finch

Spinus psaltria — lesser goldfinch

Flycatchers

TYRANNIDAE — TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

Sayornis nigricans — black phoebe

Sayornis saya — Say's phoebe

Tyrannus vociferans — Cassin's kingbird

Hawks

ACCIPITRIDAE — HAWKS, KITES, EAGLES, AND ALLIES

Buteo jamaicensis — red-tailed hawk

Hummingbirds

TROCHILIDAE — HUMMINGBIRDS

Calypte anna — Anna's hummingbird

Jays, Magpies and Crows

CORVIDAE — CROWS AND JAYS

Aphelocoma californica — California scrub-jay

Corvus brachyrhynchos — American crow

Corvus corax — common raven

Mockingbirds and Thrashers

MIMIDAE — MOCKINGBIRDS AND THRASHERS

Mimus polyglottos — northern mockingbird

Toxostoma redivivum — California thrasher

Old World Warblers and Gnatcatchers

POLIOPTILIDAE — GNATCATCHERS

Poliophtila californica californica — coastal California gnatcatcher

Pigeons and Doves

COLUMBIDAE — PIGEONS AND DOVES

Zenaida macroura — mourning dove

* *Columba livia* — rock pigeon (rock dove)

* *Streptopelia decaocto* — Eurasian collared-dove

Thrushes

TURDIDAE — THRUSHES

Sialia mexicana — western bluebird

Turdus migratorius — American robin

Wood Warblers and Allies

PARULIDAE — WOOD-WARBLERS

Setophaga coronata — yellow-rumped warbler

Wrens

TROGLODYTIDAE — WRENS

Thryomanes bewickii — Bewick's wren

Waxbills

ESTRILDIDAE — WAXBILLS

* *Lonchura punctulata* — scaly-breasted munia

New World Sparrows

PASSERELLIDAE — NEW WORLD SPARROWS

Melospiza melodia — song sparrow

Melospiza crissalis — California towhee

Pipilo maculatus — spotted towhee

Zonotrichia leucophrys — white-crowned sparrow

Typical Warblers, Parrotbills, Wrentit

SYLVIIDAE — SYLVIID WARBLERS

Chamaea fasciata — wrentit

Invertebrates

Bees

APIDAE — BEES

Bombus fervidus — yellow bumble bee

Mammals

Squirrels

SCIURIDAE — SQUIRRELS

Otospermophilus beecheyi — California ground squirrel

* signifies introduced (non-native) species

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