



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 LEAST BELL'S VIREO 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 least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*, LBVI) 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 Penasquitos Substation, mostly within Carmel Mountain Road. The purpose of the surveys summarized herein was to determine the presence or absence of LBVI 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; Sections 27, 28, 29, and 32; Township 14; and 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.

LEAST BELL'S VIREO NATURAL HISTORY

The LBVI was state listed as an endangered subspecies of Bell's vireo by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) in 1980 and federally listed as endangered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 1986. Critical habitat for the LBVI was designated by USFWS in 1994. The LBVI subspecies

is restricted to coastal and inland southern California and Baja California, Mexico. Its winter range extends along the Pacific coast from northern Mexico south to northern Nicaragua.

The LBVI is a small, gray songbird with pale yellow wash on its sides, two faint wing bars, and a faint eye ring. Preferred nesting habitat is low, dense, scrubby vegetation in early successional areas that are particularly dependent on riparian areas. Habitats may include willow woodlands and dense mule fat (*Baccharis salicifolia* subsp. *salicifolia*), scrub oak (*Quercus berberidifolia*), coastal chaparral, and mesquite (*Prosopis* sp.) patches with dense, early successional understories. The two major factors in the decline of LBVI populations are loss of habitat and nest parasitism by the brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*).

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 LBVI by the surveying biologists in 2015 (Attachment 2).

Eight focused LBVI surveys were conducted at least 10 days apart by Chambers Group qualified biologists Heather Franklin, Paul Morrissey, Christina Congedo, and Corinne Klein, who are familiar with the songs, whisper songs, calls, scolds, and visual identification of LBVI. The focused surveys were conducted according to USFWS guidelines (USFWS 2001).

All surveys were conducted on foot by looking and listening for the target species in all suitable riparian habitats within the survey area (Attachment 2). Surveys were conducted during favorable weather conditions. Surveys were not conducted during excessive heat, cold, wind, rain, or other inclement weather that would be reasonably expected to reduce bird activity and consequential detection. No more than 3 linear kilometers or 50 hectares (124 acres) of suitable habitat were surveyed by each biologist 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 LBVI. The biologists conducted the surveys from optimal stationary locations with the aid of binoculars to see and hear the target species without harming any other wildlife species in the area. Prerecorded vocalizations were not used to determine the presence/absence of LBVI. 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 LBVI is presented in Attachment 2. Approximately 4.5 acres (1.82 hectares) of suitable Riparian habitat for LBVI was present.

Mule Fat Thickets

Mule Fat Thickets consist of dense stands of mule fat with lesser amounts of willow species. This community type is classified as a mixed evergreen-deciduous shrubland with a continuous canopy and a sparse

understory. This community typically occupies intermittent streambeds and seeps and it occurs at elevations ranging from sea level to 4,100 feet amsl (Sawyer et al. 2009).

Mule Fat Thickets were present in the survey area. The native plant species found within this community in the survey area include mule fat (*Baccharis salicifolia*), arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*), narrow-leaved willow (*Salix exigua*), and black willow (*Salix gooddingii*). Non-native species found within this community in the survey area include Italian thistle (*Carduus pycnocephalus*), poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), and shortpod mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*).

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
04/14/15	Heather Franklin	7:30 A.M.	12:30 P.M.	63	71	1-3	0-2	0%	0%	0	0
04/28/15	H. Franklin, Paul Morrissey	7:30 A.M.	10:15 A.M.	69	83	0-1	1-2	0%	0%	0	0
05/12/15	H. Franklin, Christina Congedo	7:30 A.M.	11:00 A.M.	63	72	0-1	1-4	90%	20%	0	0
5/23/15	H. Franklin, C. Klein	7:30 A.M.	11:30 A.M.	63	66	0-1	1-4	95%	60%	0	0
6/4/15	H. Franklin, C. Klein	7:00 A.M.	10:30 A.M.	66	73	1-5	1-3	80%	100%	0	0
6/17/15	H. Franklin	6:30 A.M.	11:10 A.M.	65	72	1-3	2-4	100%	0%	0	0
7/2/15	H. Franklin, C. Klein	7:30 A.M.	10:30 A.M.	72	80	0-1	0-1	100%	0%	0	0
7/15/15	H. Franklin	6:00 A.M.	9:00 A.M.	64	71	1-3	1-3	100%	50%	0	0

*All temperature readings are in Fahrenheit

**All wind readings are in miles per hour

No LBVI were detected within the survey area during the 2015 surveys. The quality of habitat in the area was not considered high quality; however, a sufficient amount of moderate quality habitat within the survey area to support a LBVI territory was present. In addition, no brown-headed cowbirds were observed throughout the surveys.

Other Sensitive Species

California gnatcatcher

Several California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*; CAGN) were incidentally observed within the buffer area during several of the surveys throughout the season (Attachment 3). CAGN were observed throughout the LBVI focused surveys, as well as throughout focused CAGN surveys conducted within the same areas during the 2015 breeding season.

CONCLUSIONS

No LBVI were found within the survey area during the 2015 focused surveys. Therefore, it can be assumed LBVI are absent from the proposed Project 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

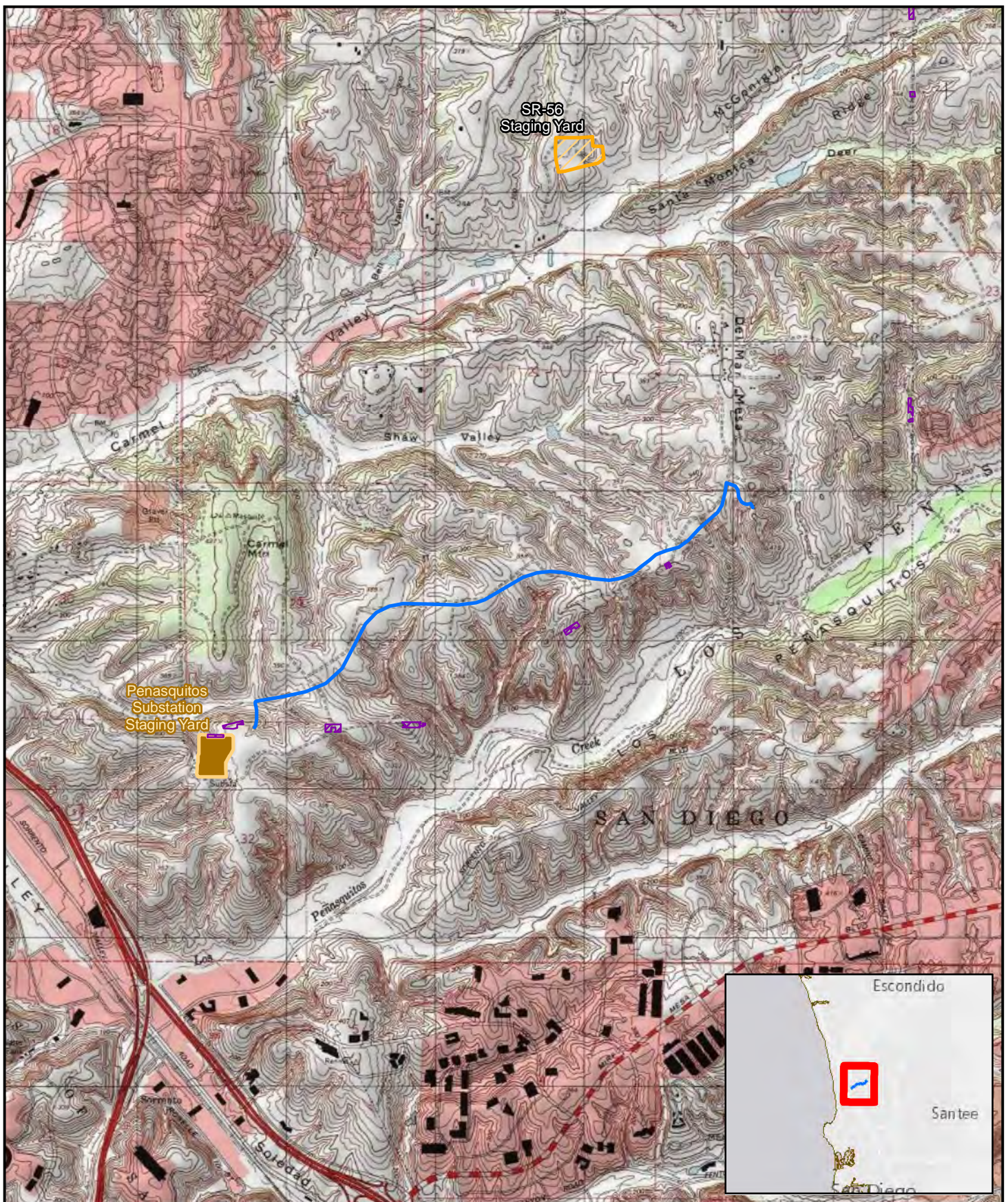
- Attachment 1 – Survey Location
- Attachment 2 – Suitable Habitat
- Attachment 3 – Survey Results
- Attachment 4 – Wildlife Species Observed

REFERENCES

- Baldwin, B. G., D. H. Goldman, D. J. Keil, R. Patterson, T. J. Rosatti, and D. H. Wilken (editors)
2012 *The Jepson Manual: Vascular Plants of California, Second Edition*. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)
2015 California Natural Diversity Database, Rarefind 4. Biogeographic Data Branch, Sacramento, CA.
- Grinnell, J. and A. H. Miller
1944 The distribution of the birds of California. *Pacific Coast Avifauna* No. 27. 1-608
- Sawyer, J.O., T. Keeler-Wolf, and J.M. Evens
2009 *A Manual of California Vegetation, 2nd edition*. California Native Plant Society Press, Sacramento, CA.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
2001 *Least Bell's Vireo Survey Guidelines*. Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office.

ATTACHMENT 1 – SURVEY LOCATION





SR-56
Staging Yard





Penasquitos
Substation
Staging Yard

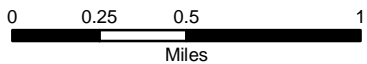
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Legend

-  Project Alignment
-  Staging Yards
-  Stringing Sites
-  Substations



Attachment 1
Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
Project Location Map

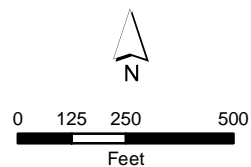
ATTACHMENT 2 – SUITABLE HABITAT





Legend

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



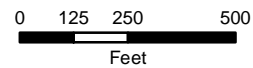
Attachment 2

**Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
Least Bell's Vireo Suitable Habitat**



Legend

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



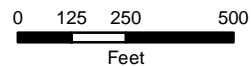
Attachment 2

**Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
Least Bell's Vireo Suitable Habitat**



Legend

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

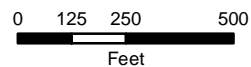


Attachment 2
Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
Least Bell's Vireo Suitable Habitat



Legend

- Project Alignment
- - - 300-foot Survey Area



Attachment 2
 Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
 Least Bell's Vireo Suitable Habitat

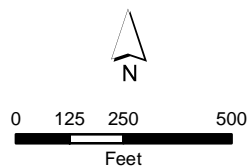
ATTACHMENT 3 – SURVEY RESULTS





Legend

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



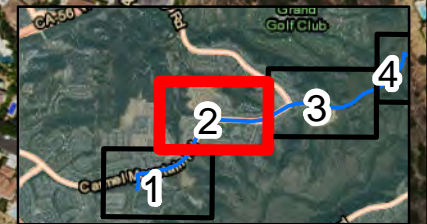
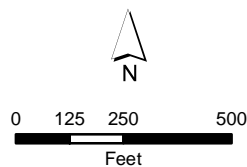
Attachment 3

**Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
Least Bell's Vireo 2015 Survey Results**

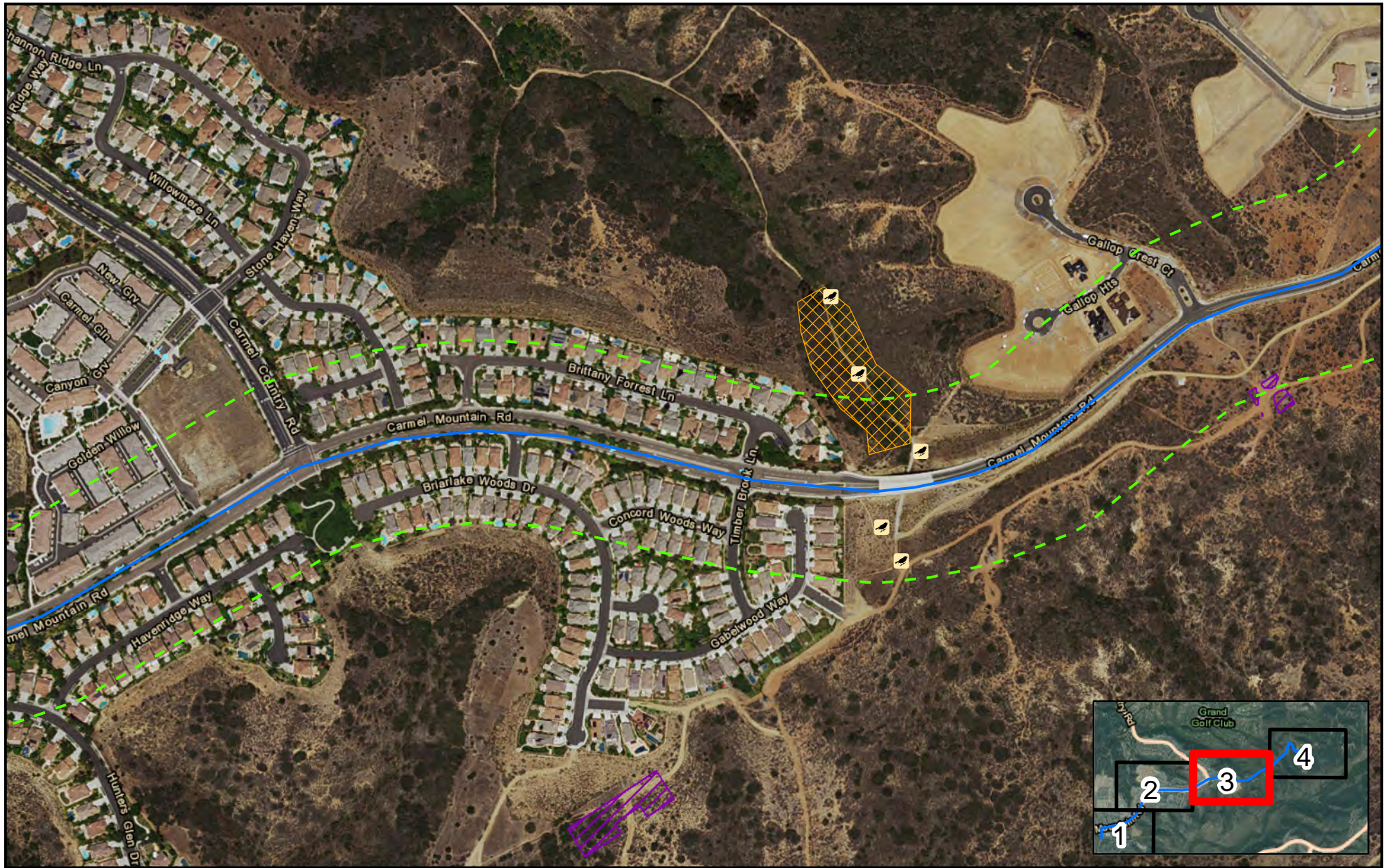


Legend

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

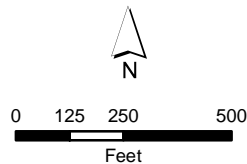


Attachment 3
 Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
 Least Bell's Vireo 2015 Survey Results



Legend

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

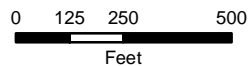


Attachment 3
 Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
 Least Bell's Vireo 2015 Survey Results



Legend

- Project Alignment
- - - 300-foot Survey Area



Attachment 3
 Sycamore to Peñasquitos Alternative Line
 Least Bell's Vireo 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
ANGUIDAE <i>Elgaria multicarinata multicarinata</i>	ALLIGATOR LIZARDS California alligator lizard
CLASS AVES	BIRDS
ACCIPITRIDAE <i>Accipiter striatus</i> <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	HAWKS, KITES, EAGLES sharp-shinned hawk red-tailed hawk
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> <i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>	WOODPECKERS Nuttall's woodpecker acorn woodpecker
TYRANNIDAE <i>Empidonax difficilis</i> <i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i> <i>Sayornis nigricans</i> <i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	TYRANT FLYCATCHERS Pacific-slope flycatcher ash-throated flycatcher black phoebe western 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 <i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>	BUSHTITS bushtit
TROGLODYTIDAE <i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	WRENS Bewick's wren

*Results of the 2015 Focused Surveys for least Bell's vireo
for the Sycamore to Penasquitos 230 Kilovolt Transmission Line Project
San Diego County, California*

Scientific Name	Common Name
<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	house wren
SYLVIIDAE <i>Chamaea fasciata</i>	OLD WORLD WARBLERS wrentit
REGULIDAE <i>Regulus calendula</i>	KINGLETS ruby-crowned kinglet
POLIOPTILIDAE <i>Polioptila caerulea</i> <i>Polioptila californica</i>	GNATCATCHERS blue-gray gnatcatcher 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
PARULIDAE <i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	WOOD WARBLERS common yellowthroat
ICTERIDAE <i>Icterus cucullatus</i> <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	BLACKBIRDS hooded oriole red-winged blackbird
EMBERIZIDAE <i>Melospiza melodia</i> <i>Melospiza crissalis</i> <i>Pipilo maculatus</i> <i>Junco hyemalis</i> <i>Aimophila ruficeps</i>	EMBERIZIDS song sparrow California towhee spotted towhee dark-eyed junco rufous-crowned sparrow
CARDINALIDAE <i>Pheucticus melanocephalus</i>	CARDINALS black-headed grosbeak
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