

Unit 5: North County Subarea of the MSCP for Unincorporated San Diego County

Unit 5 encompasses approximately 14,045 ha (34,705 ac) within the planning area for the North County Subarea of the MSCP for San Diego County. Lands proposed within this unit contain several core coastal California gnatcatcher populations and intervening linkage areas of sage scrub. This unit constitutes the primary inland linkage along the I-15 corridor between San Diego populations and those in southwestern Riverside County (Unit 10). We have considered, but have not proposed occupied high quality habitat on the Pala Indian Reservation. Recent surveys have revealed the existence of a core population on the Pala Indian Reservation. Habitat quality in this area was also depicted as high to very high by the habitat model. This population is located adjacent to a north-south corridor connecting Riverside and San Diego counties, and will likely provide a significant number of dispersing juveniles into this corridor.

Unit 6: Southern NCCP Subregion of Orange County and Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton

Unit 6 encompasses approximately 17,940 ha (44,340 ac) within the planning area for the Southern NCCP Subregion of Orange County. This unit contains some of the largest, most robust populations known (*e.g.*, Chiquita ridge), as well as essential regional populations (*e.g.*, Prima Deshecha Ca'ada, Talega Canyon) and linkages in Cristianitos Canyon, Arroyo Trabuco, and Saddle Creek/Live Oak Canyon. This unit also provides the primary linkage for core populations in North San Diego MHCP (Unit 3), and the Fallbrook Naval Weapons Station (Unit 4) to those further north in Orange County (Unit 7).

Camp Pendleton contains a coastal corridor of gnatcatcher-occupied sage scrub that provides the primary linkage between San Diego populations and those in southern Orange County. Another corridor of gnatcatcher-occupied sage scrub occurs along the Santa Margarita River valley that branches inland, connecting with habitat in the Fallbrook Naval Weapons Station (Unit 4) and further north into southwestern Riverside County (Unit 10). We are proposing critical habitat in Camp Pendleton on lands determined to be essential, but that are outside of training area boundaries. These areas include lands within the Wire Mountain housing area, De Luz housing area, and

State Park lease lands (*e.g.*, San Onofre State Beach).

Unit 7: Central-Coastal NCCP Subregions of Orange County (Central-Coastal NCCP)

Unit 7 encompasses approximately 2,340 ha (5,775 ac) within the Orange County Central-Coastal NCCP planning area. It includes core gnatcatcher populations and sage scrub habitat within select Existing Use Areas, portions of the Irvine Ranch Land Reserve, and the designated reserve (panhandle portion) of the El Toro Reuse Area. These areas contain high quality habitat and dense populations of gnatcatchers that link populations located in southern Orange County (Unit 6) with those in northern Orange and Riverside counties (Units 9 and 10).

Unit 8: Palos Verdes Peninsula Subregion, Los Angeles County

Unit 8 encompasses approximately 2,895 ha (7,160 ac) within and adjacent to the subregional planning area for the Palos Verdes Peninsula in Los Angeles County, including the City of Rancho Palos Verdes MSHCP area. This unit includes a core population of coastal California gnatcatchers and high quality sage scrub habitat in Portuguese Bend, Agua Amarga Canyon, Defense Fuel Support Point, San Pedro, and adjacent canyons, as well as connecting linkages. The former landfill adjacent to the South Coast Botanic Garden does not currently contain habitat and is not proposed as critical habitat, yet it will continue to be evaluated as it represents a significant potential restoration area for the recovery of this population.

Unit 9 : East Los Angeles County-Matrix NCCP Subregion of Orange County

Unit 9 encompasses approximately 9,140 ha (22,595 ac) within the Montebello Hills, Puente-Chino Hills, and East and West Coyote Hills areas. Core populations are known from the Montebello Hills, south slopes of the Puente-Chino Hills from Whittier east to Yorba Linda, and the East and West Coyote Hills. The Brea Canyon Landfill is not proposed as critical habitat, but it represents a significant potential restoration area to support these remaining populations. The unit also provides the primary connectivity between core gnatcatcher populations and sage scrub habitat within the Central-Coastal Subregions of the Orange County NCCP (Unit 7), the Western Riverside County MSHCP (Unit 10), and the Bonelli Regional Park core population within the East Los Angeles (Unit 12).

Unit 10: Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP)

Unit 10 encompasses approximately 71,505 ha (176,720 ac) within the proposed planning area for the Western Riverside County MSHCP. Lands proposed include important linkages from San Diego County core populations along the Santa Margarita River and Warm Springs Creek, and core populations within the Lake Skinner/Diamond Valley region and the Lake Elsinore/Lake Mathews region. Also proposed are core populations that occur along the I-15 corridor, in the Lake Perris area, in the Alessandro Heights area, in the Box Spring Mountains, and along the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains connecting into the Chino-Puente Hills. These areas also provide connectivity among core populations within Riverside County and to populations in San Diego, San Bernardino, Orange, and Los Angeles counties. Unit 10 encompasses some of the Core Reserves established under the Stephens' Kangaroo Rat HCP. The Lake Mathews/Estelle Mountain, Steele Peak, Lake Perris/San Jacinto Core Reserves, the Potrero Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and the Southwestern Riverside County Multi-Species Reserve provide high quality habitat for the coastal California gnatcatcher. Lands proposed as critical habitat within Unit 10 are generally encompassed by the Criteria Area (from which the future preserve area will be delineated) designated as part of the MSHCP. Areas proposed outside of the Criteria Area are consistent with those designated in the previous final designation of critical habitat (65 FR 63680). Lands designated outside of Criteria Areas include the Alessandro Heights, which is essential for maintaining linkages with populations in southern San Bernardino County, and the eastern slope of the Santa Ana Mountains, which is an essential linkage to the Puente-Chino Hills and central Orange County (Units 7 and 9). This unit incorporates habitat in the vicinity of Aguanga that is one of three locations in the range of the species, and the only location in the United States, where the California gnatcatcher co-occurs with its sister species, the Black-tailed gnatcatcher (*Polioptila melanura*; Weaver 1998; Atwood 1988). Maintaining these areas of sympatry (overlapping occupation) are important for reinforcing reproductive isolating mechanisms such as habitat preferences and vocalizations that prevent hybridization between the two species (Weaver 1998, Atwood 1988). This unit