

also incorporates high-quality coastal sage scrub south and east of Diamond Valley Reservoir that has been shown to be resistant to type conversion to non-native grassland, probably due to the prevalence of gabbro-basalt soils in this area (Minnich and Dezzani 1998). The coastal sage scrub in this region therefore has the highest probability of resisting type conversion in the future, and therefore has the greatest potential to maintain diverse, high quality coastal sage scrub vegetation through time. This unit also encompasses contiguous habitats in southern San Bernardino County, including core populations in the Jurupa Hills, and the Blue Mountain/Reche Canyon region. The Santa Ana River appears to be an important movement corridor in this area, connecting the Jurupa and La Loma Hills to populations in the Box Springs Mountains, as well as to the few pairs known from the Pedley Hills and Norco Hills. Though a few coastal California gnatcatchers have been observed from the upper Santa Ana River wash in the vicinity of Highland, we do not yet have evidence that this area constitutes a core population.

#### **Unit 11: San Bernardino Valley MSHCP, San Bernardino County**

Unit 11 encompasses approximately 6,065 ha (14,990 ac) along the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains in the Etiwanda Fan and Lytle and Cajon Washes. The core populations in these alluvial fans utilize a unique habitat type at the northern extent of their inland range. The vegetation mosaic of the Etiwanda fan is complex and consists of Riversidian alluvial fan sage scrub in the active floodplains of the major washes, and Riversidian sage scrub on the alluvial fan between major washes. These habitats are interspersed with stands of *Quercus dumosa* (scrub oak), *Ceanothus leucodermis* (white buckthorn), *Cercocarpus betuloides* (mountain mahogany), *Garrya* ssp. (silktassel), *Rhamnus* spp. (buckthorn), and *Rhus ovata* (sugarbush). The species' persistence in these unique habitat types may be due to unique genetic or behavioral adaptations that may be important to the species as environmental conditions change through time (Lesica and Allendorf 1995). Linkages from these populations to more southerly portions of the range may include the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains to the west and the San Bernardino Mountains to the east, however these linkages have yet to be confirmed.

#### **Unit 12: East Los Angeles County**

Unit 12 encompasses approximately 1,570 ha (3,890 ac) in eastern Los Angeles County in Bonelli Regional Park and along the San Jose Hills to the west. This unit functions as an archipelago of persistent populations toward the northern end of the range of the species, and is a likely source population for the pairs that are reported from the foothills of the San Gabriel mountains north of the Los Angeles basin. Disturbed and vacant areas within Bonelli Regional Park and the BKK landfill at the western end of the San Jose Hills represent the last available vacant land for restoration of habitat to recover the species in this unit. Isolated habitat patches between this unit and the East Los Angeles County-Matrix NCCP Subregion of Orange County (Unit 9), are not included, but may serve to maintain connectivity. This unit does not include a potential movement corridor along the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains towards the Etiwanda Fan (Unit 11) as we do not currently have evidence of movement through this area.

#### **Unit 13: Western Los Angeles and Ventura Counties**

Unit 13 encompasses approximately 41,795 ha (103,290 ac) in eastern Ventura and western Los Angeles counties along the southern and eastern slopes of the Santa Susana Mountains and a portion of the interior foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains. It includes the only known breeding population of coastal California gnatcatchers in Ventura County and incorporates high quality coastal sage scrub in the Placerita, Box Springs Canyon, Plum Canyon, and Moorpark areas. Its primary function is as a regional source population for the species and as the east-west linkage of sage scrub habitat between the core population in Ventura county and the pairs documented in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains. This unit encompasses the northern and western distributional extreme of the coastal California gnatcatcher's current range, and as such would act as a source population for any future recovery of gnatcatcher populations to the north and west. Peripheral populations are also important in that they may contain unique genetic or behavioral adaptations that may be important to the species as environmental conditions change through time (Lesica and Allendorf 1995).

#### **Effects of Critical Habitat Designation**

##### *Section 7 Consultation*

Individuals, organizations, States, local governments, and other non-Federal entities are affected by the designation of critical habitat if their actions occur on Federal lands, require a Federal permit, license, or other authorization, or involve Federal funding. Regulations implementing this interagency cooperation provision of the Act are codified at 50 CFR part 402.

Section 7(a)(4) of the Act requires Federal agencies to confer with us on any action that is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a proposed species or result in destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat. We may issue a formal conference report if requested by a Federal agency. Formal conference reports on proposed critical habitat contain a biological opinion that is prepared according to 50 CFR 402.14, as if critical habitat were designated. We may adopt the formal conference report as the biological opinion when the critical habitat is designated, if no significant new information or changes in the action alter the content of the opinion (see 50 CFR 402.10(d)).

If a species is listed or critical habitat is designated, section 7(a)(2) of the Act requires Federal agencies to ensure that actions they authorize, fund, or carry out are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species or to destroy or adversely modify its critical habitat. If a Federal action may affect a listed species or its critical habitat, the responsible Federal agency (action agency) must enter into consultation with us. Through this consultation we would ensure that the permitted actions do not adversely modify critical habitat.

When we issue a biological opinion concluding that a project is likely to result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat, we also provide reasonable and prudent alternatives to the project, if any are identifiable. Reasonable and prudent alternatives are defined at 50 CFR 402.02 as alternative actions identified during consultation that can be implemented in a manner consistent with the intended purpose of the action, that are consistent with the scope of the Federal agency's legal authority and jurisdiction, that are economically and technologically feasible, and that the Director believes would avoid destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. Reasonable and prudent alternatives can vary from slight project modifications to extensive redesign or relocation of the project. Costs associated with implementing a