U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE—SPOTLIGHT SPECIES ACTION PLAN (2010-2014)

Common Name: **Coastal California Gnatcatcher**
Scientific Name: ***Polioptila californica californica***
Lead Region: Pacific Southwest Region (Region 8)
Lead Field Office: Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office

Species Information:

Overview: The coastal California gnatcatcher is the northernmost subspecies of California gnatcatcher, a songbird (passerine). It occurs from Ventura and Los Angeles Counties south to about 30 degrees north latitude in Baja California, Mexico. Areas with coastal sage vegetation have been subject to much urban development resulting in conflict with construction or other development projects and other forms of economic activity. To address this economic conflict and promote the recovery of the gnatcatcher, the Service and California Department of Fish and Game have worked jointly with jurisdictions and other stakeholders to prepare regional Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCPs) that permitted incidental take of gnatcatchers and provided mitigation and management to benefit the species. These regional HCP/NCCP Plans, most of which have now been finalized, established a network of core and linkage habitat preserves throughout much of the gnatcatcher's U.S. range. Recent wildland fires, including the firestorms of 2003 and especially 2007, have blackened tens of thousands of acres of gnatcatcher habitat including areas preserved under the regional HCPs/NCCPs. The burned areas are now at risk of being overrun by nonnative grasses and forbs (habitat type-conversion).

Status:	Threatened
Recovery Priority Number:	3C (subspecies, high threat, high recovery potential, conflict)
Recovery Plan:	None
Other:	Listed: March 30, 1994 (58 FR 16742) 4(d) Rule: December 10, 1993 (58 FR 65088) Revised Critical Habitat: December 19, 2007 (72 FR 72509)

Threats:

Factor A: Urban and agricultural development; wildland fire; habitat type conversion (caused by presence of nonnative plants, abnormally high wildland fire frequency, atmospheric pollution, anthropogenic disturbance).
Factor E: Climate change (increasing the likelihood of droughts and wildland fires).

Target: Improve the population status of the coastal California gnatcatcher.

The goal is to increase the size of gnatcatcher populations by improving habitat quality at sites burned in the past 10 years.

Measure: Increase numbers of coastal California gnatcatchers by creating more available habitat.

Table 1. Target–Measure–Action quick-reference guide. See "Actions" section for details.

Target	Measure	Action	Status	Duration/ Timeline	Approx. Cost	Cooperating Parties
Improve status of the coastal California gnatcatcher	Increase numbers of coastal California gnatcatchers	Select sites for habitat restoration/ improvement	Not Started	Duration: ~6 months. Timeline: Be completed in time for restoration work to avoid nesting season.	Variable	NGOs, Universities, private landowners, State and Federal agencies, regional HCP/NCCP jurisdictions.
		Initiate habitat restoration at selected habitat sites.	Not Started	Duration: 5+ years, but depends on site(s) selected. Timeline: Conduct groundwork outside of nesting season.	~$80,000 per acre	NGOs, private landowners, State and Federal agencies, regional HCP/NCCP jurisdictions.

Actions:

1. Work with partners to select sites that would be the best candidates for restoration. A possible approach could include conducting a GIS-based, (U.S.) range-wide analysis of gnatcatcher habitat to assess the level or likelihood of habitat degradation from recent wildland fires. Selection of sites for management could be done through a prioritization schema, including assessing level (or likelihood of) degradation, amount of benefit the species is likely receive by restoring that site, and cost effectiveness. This action, as a likely precursor step to Action 2, implements Measure 1 and addresses threats under Factor A.

   Service's role—Fund or conduct an analysis to prioritize and select areas to be restored, or work with partners who could conduct such an analysis, or both. The methodologies for these actions will need to be developed first.

   Partners and stakeholders—Private and public partners, including HCP/NCCP jurisdictions, could contribute funds, information (GIS data), and in-kind support (e.g., ground-truthing) to improve prioritization schema.

   Estimated Costs—TBD

2. Work with partners to initiate habitat restoration at selected habitat sites. This action implements Measure 1 and addresses threats under Factor A. Potential examples include:

   Service's role—Coordinate with partners and stakeholders, including Regional HCP/NCCP jurisdictions, to identify funding sources.

   - Section 6: Work with the State of California for funding of gnatcatcher habitat restoration.
   - Section 7: Work with Action Agencies to include compatible conservation measures for habitat restoration.
   - Section 10: Work with existing permit holders and applicants to address management in preserve areas, especially response to habitat type conversion and wildland fire.
   - Safe Harbors and Partners: Work with willing landowners to promote habitat restoration, especially in areas not covered by a regional HCP/NCCP plans.
   - Refuges: Initiate process to restore degraded habitat on existing Refuge lands and plan for restoration on potential Refuge lands (e.g., El Toro).

   Partners and stakeholders— Private and public partners, including HCP/NCCP jurisdictions, should contribute funds and in-kind support.

   Estimated Costs—Based upon similar programs of which we are aware, we estimate that post-fire restoration of coastal scrub, including 5 years of monitoring and management to achieve site-specific success criteria, would cost approximately $80,000 per acre. Some sites may require additional monitoring time and hence, additional cost.

Additional Funding Analysis: Any additional funds can be put toward land purchase or management described in the "Actions" section above. To validate the HCP/NCCP habitat preserve system of core areas and linkages, additional funds should be directed toward a genetics-based study examining the rate of gene flow between HCP/NCCP core populations and along linkage corridors.

FIELD OFFICE APPROVAL:

ACTING

Lead Field Supervisor, Fish and Wildlife Service

Approve _____ *Date* AUG 1 1 2009

Scott A. Sobiech

REGIONAL OFFICE CONCURRENCE:

Assistant Regional Director Ecological Services, Fish and Wildlife Service

Concur _____ *Date* 8/27/09