

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

# California Endangered Species Act



## Petition Evaluation for LeConte's Thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*)

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Report to the Fish and Game Commission  
January 2026



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS, AND TERMS

BLM – Bureau of Land Management
CESA – California Endangered Species Act
Commission – California Fish and Game Commission
Department – California Department of Fish and Wildlife
ESA – Federal Endangered Species Act
HCP – Habitat Conservation Plan
INRMP – Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan
NCCP – Natural Community Conservation Plan
NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act
SGCN – Species of Greatest Conservation Need
SSC – Species of Special Concern
subsp. – subspecies (singular)
subspp. – subspecies (plural)
USFWS – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This petition evaluation for LeConte's Thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*) has been prepared by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) in response to the petition to list LeConte's Thrasher as threatened or endangered under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). The purpose of this petition evaluation is to provide a recommendation to the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) on whether the petition provides sufficient information to indicate the petitioned action may be warranted.

LeConte's Thrasher is a medium-sized songbird. The species inhabits desert scrub, yucca (*Yucca* spp.), and cholla (*Cylindropuntia* spp.) habitats up to 1,600 m in elevation in the Mojave Desert and Sonoran Desert, and saltbush (*Atriplex* spp.) habitats in the southwestern San Joaquin Valley. It is also found in portions of Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and Mexico. The petitioner notes a decline in the species' abundance and the Department has few recent detection records across some portions of the species' range. Recent surveys have documented a range contraction in the San Joaquin Valley and potential extirpation in the Coachella Valley.

The Department has determined that the petition addresses each of the required petition components listed in Fish and Game Code section 2072.3 and California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 670.1, subdivision (d)(1):

- Life history
- Range
- Distribution
- Detailed distribution map
- Kind of habitat necessary for survival
- Abundance
- Population trend
- Factors affecting the ability to survive and reproduce
- Degree and immediacy of threat
- Impact of existing management efforts
- Suggestions for future management
- Availability and sources of information

In completing its petition evaluation, the Department considered the information in the petition and other relevant information the Department possesses. The Department has determined that there is sufficient scientific information to indicate that the petitioned action to list LeConte's Thrasher as threatened or endangered under CESA may be

warranted. Therefore, the Department recommends that the Commission accept the petition for further consideration pursuant to CESA.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Petition Evaluation Overview

This petition evaluation serves as the basis for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (Department) recommendation to the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) on whether the petition to list LeConte's Thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*) as threatened or endangered under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) should be accepted and considered. The recommendation is based on the sufficiency of scientific information in the petition, as well as other relevant information that was reviewed by the Department during the evaluation period.

A petition to list a species under CESA must include “information regarding the population trend, range, distribution, abundance, and life history of a species, the factors affecting the ability of the population to survive and reproduce, the degree and immediacy of the threat, the impact of existing management efforts, suggestions for future management, and the availability and sources of information. The petition shall also include information regarding the kind of habitat necessary for species survival, a detailed distribution map, and any other factors that the petitioner deems relevant” (Fish & G. Code, § 2072.3; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 670.1, subd. (d)(1)).

Once a petition is submitted to the Commission, the Department has 90 days (120 days with extension) to prepare a petition evaluation that assesses each of the petition components and makes a recommendation to the Commission as to whether there is sufficient scientific information to indicate that the petitioned action to list the species under CESA may be warranted (Fish & G. Code, § 2073.5, subds. (a)-(b)). Once completed by the Department, the petition evaluation is delivered to the Commission and placed on the agenda for receipt at the next available meeting of the Commission. At that time, the petition evaluation will be made available to the public for a 30-day public comment period prior to the Commission taking any action on the petition. The Commission then considers the petition, the Department's petition evaluation and recommendation, written comments received, and oral testimony, and will then make a finding at the next available meeting of the Commission as to whether the petition provides “sufficient information to indicate that the petitioned action may be warranted” (Fish & G. Code, § 2074.2, subd. (e)(2)). The standard for accepting a petition for consideration and assessing sufficiency of information is addressed in *Center for Biological Diversity v. California Fish and Game Commission* (2008) 166 Cal.App.4th 597.

If the Commission determines that the petitioned action may be warranted, the species becomes a candidate for CESA listing and proceeds to the status review stage of the CESA listing process. The Department then prepares a peer-reviewed report that advises

the Commission on whether the petitioned action is warranted, based upon the best scientific information available (Fish & G. Code, § 2074.6). Finally, the Commission determines whether the petitioned action to list the species as threatened or endangered is warranted, based on the Department’s status review and other information in the administrative record (Fish & G. Code, § 2075.5).

## **1.2 CESA Petition History**

On September 16, 2025, the Center for Biological Diversity submitted to the Commission a petition to list LeConte’s Thrasher as threatened or endangered under CESA. On September 26, 2025, the Commission referred the petition to the Department for evaluation. At its meeting on October 8, 2025, the Commission officially acknowledged receipt of the petition. At its meeting on December 10, 2025, the Commission granted the Department’s request for a 30-day extension of the period to review the petition and prepare this petition evaluation.

## **1.3 Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) Petition History**

On July 30, 2025, the Center for Biological Diversity submitted a petition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to list LeConte’s Thrasher as a threatened or endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. § 1531 et seq.). At the time this CESA petition evaluation was prepared, USFWS had not published a determination regarding the federal petition.

## **1.4 Additional Species Status Designations**

### *1.4.1 California Species of Special Concern*

The petition states that the San Joaquin Valley population of LeConte’s Thrasher is designated as a Species of Special Concern (SSC) by the Department. The Department has assigned the species a Global Rank of G4 and State Rank of S3 (“Vulnerable”), meaning it is at moderate risk of extirpation in the state due to a fairly restricted range, relatively few populations or occurrences, recent and widespread declines, threats, or other factors (CNDDDB 2025).

### *1.4.2 USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern*

LeConte’s Thrasher is listed by the USFWS on the Birds of Conservation Concern list (CNDDDB 2025).

### **1.4.3 Bureau of Land Management Sensitive Species**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has listed *Toxostoma lecontei* as a “Bureau Sensitive” species (CNDDB 2025) but lists the common name for the species as San Joaquin LeConte’s Thrasher, which the petition states is a subspecies of LeConte’s Thrasher (*T. l. macmillanorum*). The petition states that it is unclear whether BLM considers the entire species as a Bureau Sensitive species, or just the San Joaquin subspecies.

### **1.4.4 IUCN Red List**

LeConte’s Thrasher is considered a species of Least Concern by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List (IUCN 2025).

### **1.4.5 NatureServe Conservation Status Ranks**

NatureServe is a network of over 60 government and non-governmental organizations that uses a standardized approach to assess the conservation status of each species.

LeConte’s Thrasher is globally ranked as G4 by NatureServe, but populations in California are ranked as S3 (Vulnerable; (NatureServe 2025)).

## **2 SPECIES DESCRIPTION AND TAXONOMY**

CESA defines the “species” eligible for listing to include “species or subspecies” (Fish & G. Code, §§ 2062, 2067, 2068).

### **2.1 Species Description**

The petition describes LeConte’s Thrasher as a non-migratory, medium-sized bird, with an adult body mass ranging from 55–76 g, and a body length of 24–28 cm (Borgman et al. 2024; CLO 2025). The species has a strongly decurved, dark colored bill (CLO 2025). It has sand-colored plumage with an unmarked breast, thick dark malar strip bordering the throat, and long dark tail with rusty or peachy wash underneath (Borgman et al. 2024; CLO 2025). It also has dark eyes and legs (CLO 2025).

### **2.2 Species Taxonomy**

The petition describes LeConte’s Thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*) as a songbird belonging to the Mimidae family, genus *Toxostoma*, species *T. lecontei*. The petition states that LeConte’s Thrasher is accepted as a valid species by the American Ornithological Society and other taxonomic authorities. The petition notes that there are two recognized subspecies of LeConte’s Thrasher: *T. l. lecontei* and *T. l. arenicola*. The *T. l. lecontei*

subspecies is dispersed across the Mojave and Sonoran Desert regions of California. The petition also notes that a geographically isolated population of LeConte's Thrasher occurring in the San Joaquin Valley was previously a presumed third subspecies (*T. L. macmillanorum*), but that support of subspecies status for this population is weak and the population is no longer recognized as a subspecies (Sheppard 2020; Borgman et al. 2024). Despite the weak support of subspecies status, the petition states that the San Joaquin Valley population is unique compared to other LeConte's Thrasher populations in California.

## **2.3 Similar Taxa**

LeConte's Thrasher is one of the seven recognized species of thrashers (*Toxostoma* spp., *Oreoscoptes* sp.) occurring in California. The other six thrashers are: Bendire's Thrasher (*T. bendirei*), Brown Thrasher (*T. Rufum*), California Thrasher (*T. redivivum*), Crissal Thrasher (*T. crissale*), Curve-billed Thrasher (*T. Curvirostre*), and Sage Thrasher (*O. montanus*). While LeConte's Thrasher overlaps in range in California with several of these species (Bendire's Thrasher, Crissal Thrasher, and Sage Thrasher), they are distinguishable from other species due to their general morphology, including plumage and bill morphology, and songs (CLO 2025).

## **3 SUMMARY OF PETITION COMPONENTS**

Pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2072.3 and California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 670.1, subdivision (d)(1), the Department evaluated whether the petition contained information on each of the following petition components:

- Life history;
- Range;
- Distribution;
- Detailed distribution map;
- Kind of habitat necessary for survival;
- Abundance;
- Population trend;
- Factors affecting the ability to survive and reproduce;
- Degree and immediacy of threat;
- Impact of existing management efforts;
- Suggestions for future management; and
- Availability and sources of information.

The Department did not receive new information from the public during the petition evaluation period (Fish & G. Code, § 2073.4). Pursuant to Fish and Game Code section

2073.5, the Department evaluated the petition to determine whether there is, or is not, sufficient information to indicate that the petitioned action may be warranted. A summary of the relevant information from the petition for each of the petition components is presented below. The Department has grouped similar components together and renamed components to create a more cohesive and readable document.

### **3.1 Life History**

This section summarizes the information in the petition regarding the species' life history (Fish & G. Code, § 2072.3; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 670.1, subd. (d)(1)).

The petition describes the life history of LeConte's Thrasher on pages 1–2 and 6–11, providing information on the species' diet, territoriality, breeding, growth and longevity, and migration and dispersal. The following is a summary of the information presented.

The petition states that LeConte's Thrasher mainly forages for prey on the ground, using their bills to clear litter and dig pits in the ground. The diet of LeConte's Thrasher consists primarily of invertebrates, but they will also consume small vertebrates such as lizards, the eggs of other birds, and some seeds. They rarely drink water and meet water needs via food consumption.

The petition states that the breeding territory of LeConte's Thrasher ranges from 4–12 ha but also reports individuals have been documented using up to 40 ha of habitat over multiple years.

The petition discusses that LeConte's Thrasher breeds annually and can begin at 9–11.5 months of age. The breeding season typically begins in December–January. During the breeding season, males sing from shrubs and trees, establishing breeding territories. Females will also occasionally sing. LeConte's Thrasher are typically monogamous and mate for life, with mates remaining together year-round. Both sexes incubate and raise chicks.

The petition notes that nesting typically occurs between February to mid-June, but exact timing varies yearly and geographically (as early as January). Generally, LeConte's Thrasher requires dense shrubs which can adequately support and protect nests, with shrub structure likely being more important than shrub species. In California, a majority of LeConte's Thrasher nests have been detected in cholla cacti species. Clutch sizes range from 2–5 eggs. The San Joaquin Valley population tends to have larger clutch sizes than other populations. LeConte's Thrasher may have 2–3 clutches per breeding season. The mean incubation period for eggs is 15.8 days (14–19 days).

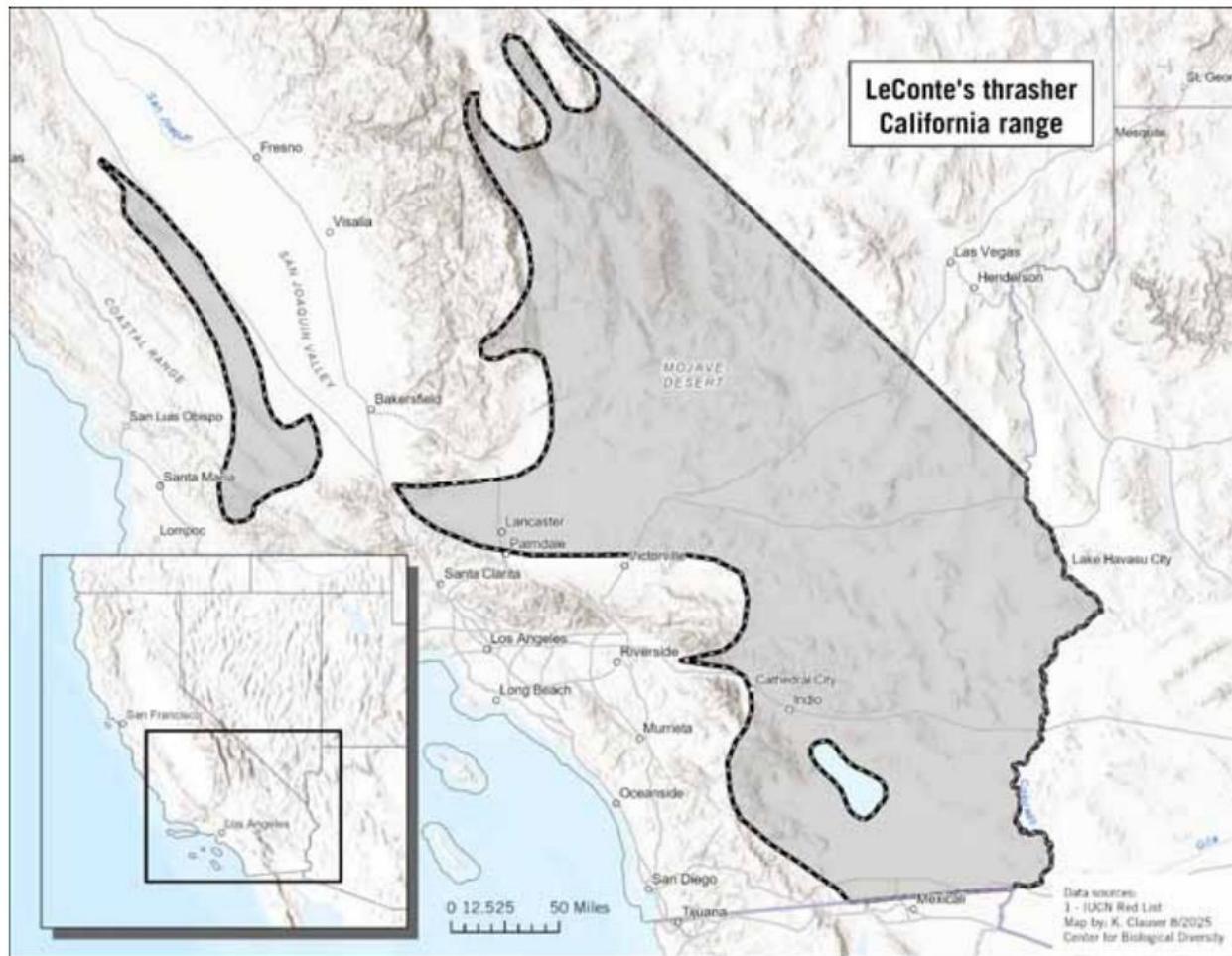
The petition notes that juvenile survival is approximately 46% for the first 58 days after fledging with annual survival as low as 20%. Annual survivorship for adults is estimated around 60% and the mean longevity for LeConte's Thrasher is stated as 7–8 years.

The petition describes LeConte's Thrasher as a non-migratory species and that birds maintain their home-range year-round. The species has restricted dispersal into nearby, suitable habitats, with dispersing individuals moving 5–10 km in their lifetime. Mean fledgling dispersal was noted as 0.7 km.

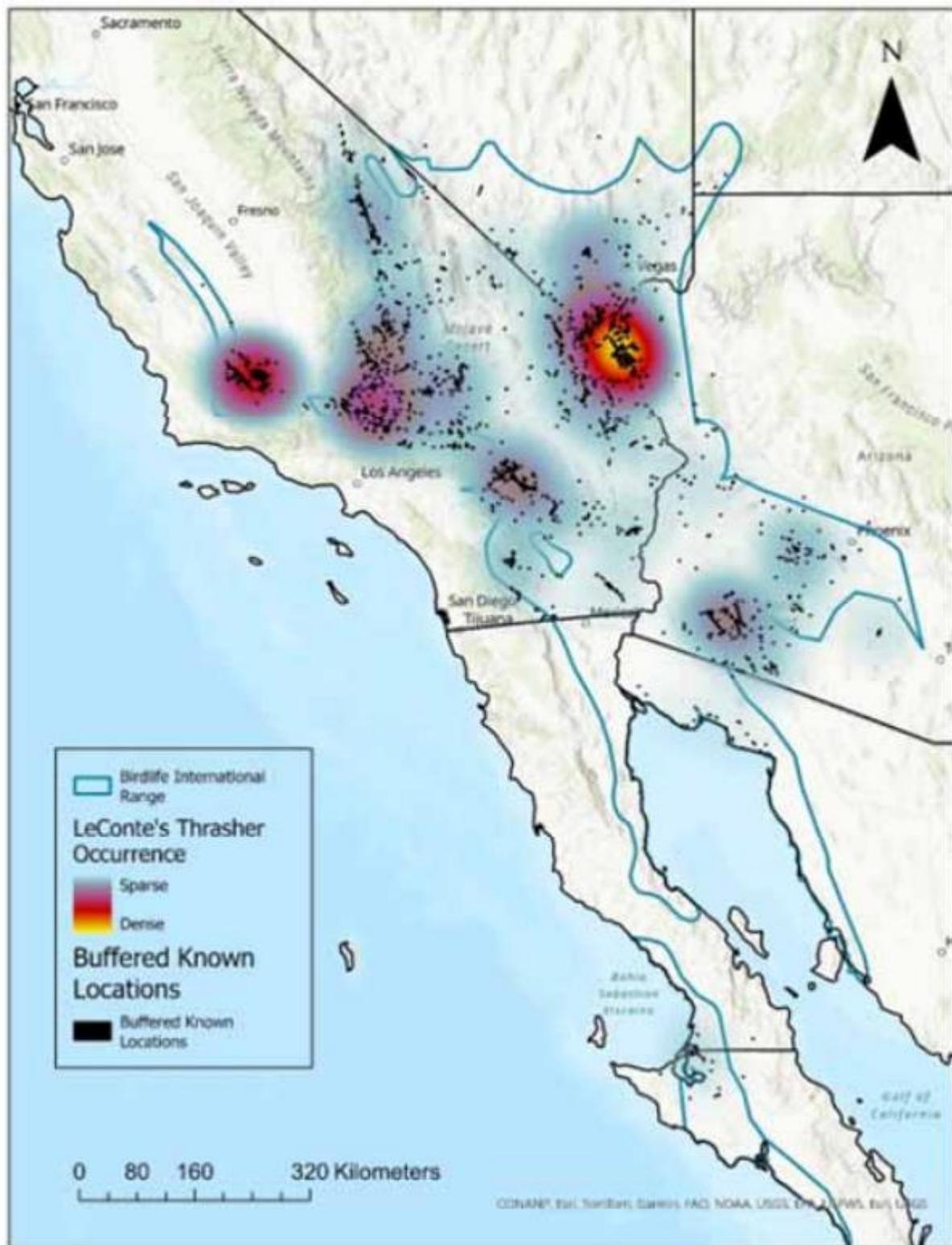
### **3.2 Range and Distribution**

This section summarizes the information in the petition regarding the species' range and distribution and provides a detailed distribution map (Fish & G. Code, § 2072.3; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 670.1, subd. (d)(1)). A species' range for the purposes of CESA and this petition evaluation is the species' range within California (Cal. Forestry Assn. v. Cal. Fish and Game Com. (2007) 156 Cal.App.4<sup>th</sup> 1535, 1551). Range describes the general geographical area in which a species occurs. Distribution describes the actual sites where individuals and populations of the species occur within the species' range.

The petition describes the range and distribution of LeConte's Thrasher on pages 14–17, 20–24, and 26. The petition notes that approximately 53% of the global population (82% of the U.S. population) resides in California. The petition states that the species' global range encompasses California, east into Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and into Sonora and Baja California Mexico. The species has been detected from -81 to 1,600 m in elevation. In California, the species is known from the San Joaquin Valley and Mojave and Sonoran deserts of southeastern California (**Figure 1**, **Figure 2**). The species range also overlaps with five EPA Level III ecoregions: 1) Mojave Basin and Range; 2) Sonoran Desert; 3) California Coastal Sage; 4) Chaparral; and 5) Oak Woodlands. Although not described in the petition, the species observation points in the distribution map (**Figure 2**) are from multiple data sources, including eBird, surveys conducted by the Desert Thrasher Working Group, and other research efforts (Borgman et al. 2024).

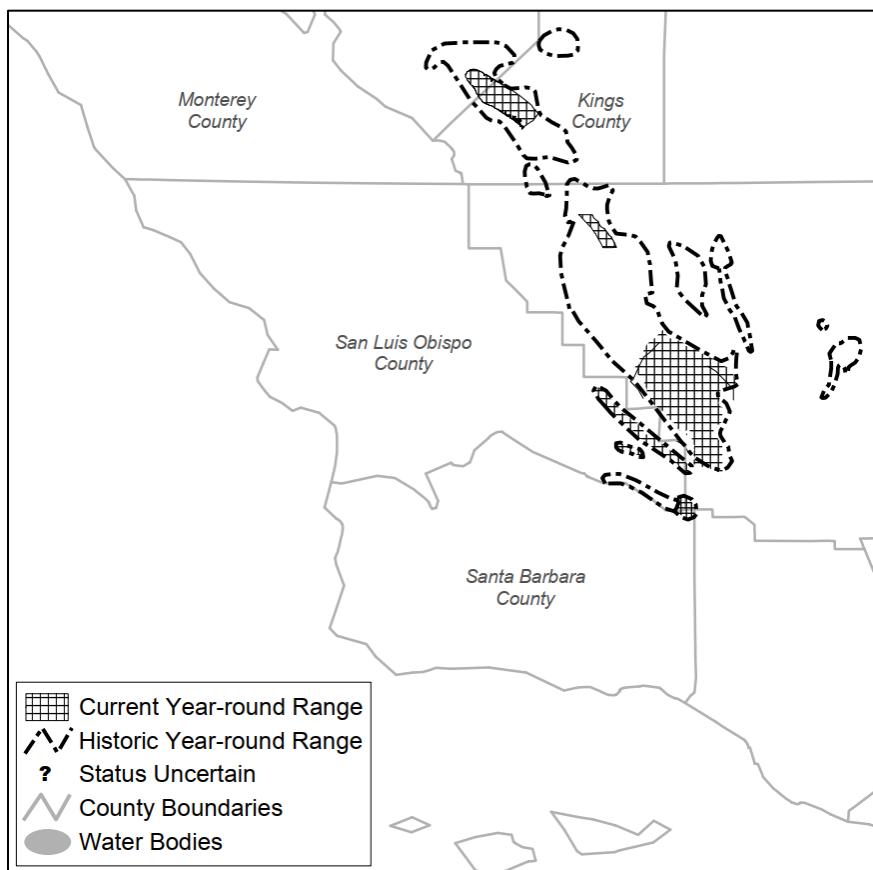


**Figure 1.** Historic range of LeConte's Thrasher in California. Data sources: IUCN Redlist; Borgman et al. 2024. Figure 8 in the petition.



**Figure 2.** Global range and population density map of LeConte's Thrasher from Borgman et al. 2024. Presence is depicted as a heat density map, with black dots as buffered confirmed detection points. Figure 6 in the petition.

The petition states that the San Joaquin Valley population previously had a historical range from near Huron and Coalinga (Fresno County), south to the Tehachapi Mountains and north of Bakersfield (Kern County), including the Carrizo Plain, Cuyama Valley, and the Panoche Hills (**Figure 3**). The petition describes the San Joaquin Valley population's range as having contracted (as of 2008), with the species range known to encompass the McKittrick-Maricopa area of Kern County and the Carrizo-Elkhorn Plains area of San Luis Obispo County (**Figure 3**).



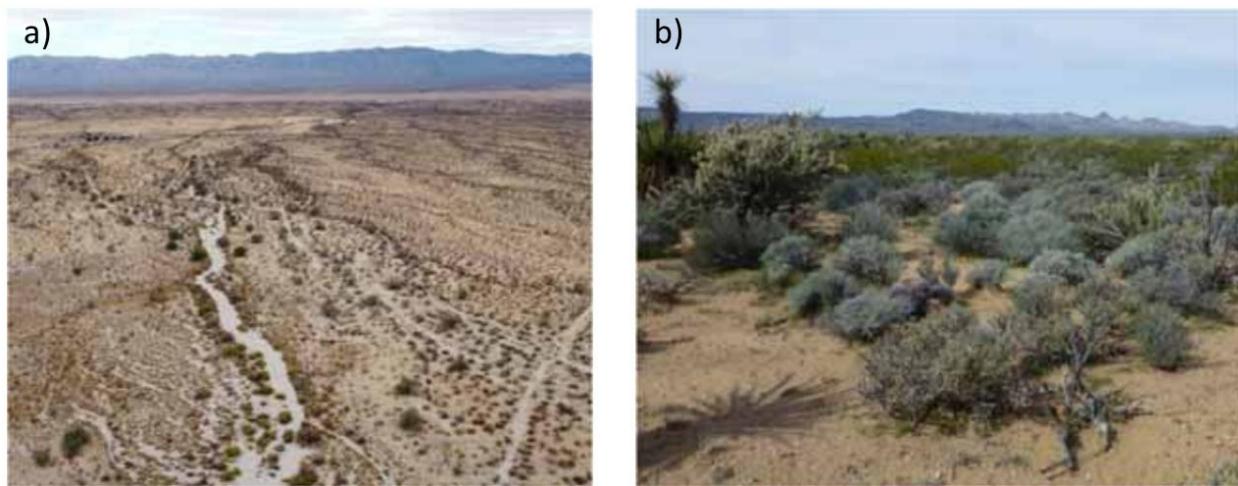
**Figure 3.** Known breeding range of LeConte's Thrasher in the San Joaquin Valley as of 2008. Source: (Fitton 2008). Adapted from Figure 9 in the petition.

### 3.3 Habitat

This section summarizes the information in the petition regarding the kind of habitat necessary for species survival (Fish & G. Code, § 2072.3; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 670.1, subd. (d)(1)).

The petition discusses the habitat of LeConte's Thrasher in the “Habitat” section on pages 14–17 and “Breeding” section on pages 8–9.

The petition states that LeConte's Thrasher's general habitat requirements include desert scrub habitat and Mojave yucca (*Yucca schidigera*) and Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) dominated woodlands, with a preference for areas with scattered cholla and saltbush rarely >2 m in height. Habitat is distributed within alluvial fans, desert flats, or the margins of river drainages and dry lakes. The petition suggests that habitat patches <160 ha are not used by LeConte's Thrasher and that the species may need at least 1,000 ha of suitable habitat to support a viable population of approximately 250 individuals.



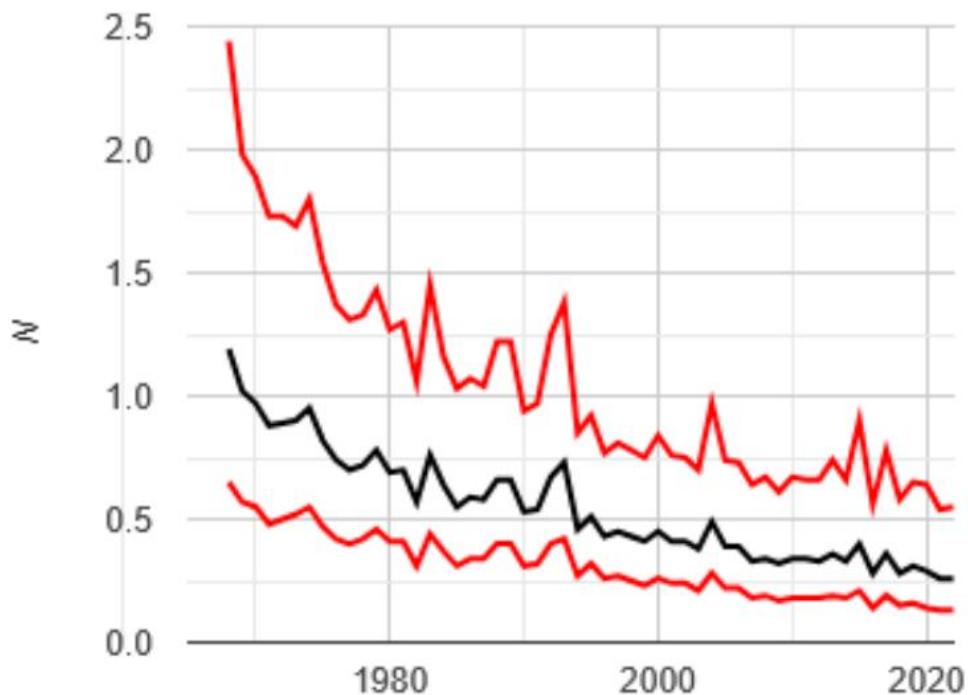
**Figure 4.** Examples of LeConte's Thrasher habitat in Sonora Desert habitat (a) and Mojave Basin and Range habitat (b). Photos from Borgman et al. (2024). Figure 3 in the petition.

Within California, LeConte's Thrashers in the Mojave Basin and Range and Sonoran Desert ecoregions are typically detected in areas of little topographic relief or gentle rolling hills and shallow washes. Typical vegetation of LeConte's Thrasher habitat in the Mojave Basin and Range ecoregion (**Figure 4b**) contains Mojave yucca, silver cholla (*Cylindropuntia echinocarpa*), buckhorn cholla (*C. acanthocarpa*), desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*), desert almond (*Prunus fasciculata*), and catclaw acacia (*Senegalia greggii*). Typical vegetation habitat in the Sonoran Desert ecoregion (**Figure 4a**) includes saltbush, bursage (*Ambrosia* spp.), *Lycium* spp., palo verde (*Parkinsonia* spp.), mesquite (*Prosopis* spp., *Neltuma* spp.), ironwood (*Olneya tesota*), creosote (*Larrea tridentata*), brittlebush (*Encelia fainosa*), and cholla.

The population of LeConte's Thrasher in the San Joaquin Valley occurs on gentle to rolling, well drained slopes bisected by dry washes. Occupied habitat has sparse to moderate cover of common saltbush (*Atriplex polycarpa*), spiny saltbush (*A. spinifera*), and desert tea (*Ephedra californica*). Often there are high amounts of bare ground or patches of low-growing grass, but some shrub cover is required for nesting. Valley floors may provide suitable nesting habitat but are apparently unsuitable foraging habitat.

### 3.4 Abundance and Population Trend

This section summarizes the information in the petition regarding the species' abundance and population trend (Fish & G. Code, § 2072.3; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 670.1, subd. (d)(1)).



**Figure 5.** U.S. Breeding Bird Survey population trends for LeConte's Thrasher, 1966–2022. The black line represents the annual population index, and the red lines represent the upper and lower 95% Confidence Intervals. Figure 11 in the petition.

The petition discusses the abundance and population trends of LeConte's Thrasher on pages 29–33. The petition estimates that approximately 37,000 adult individuals breed in California, which is 82% of the estimated U.S. population. The petition references U.S. Breeding Bird Survey data and notes that LeConte's Thrasher is one of the fastest declining avian taxa in North America (**Figure 5**), with U.S. populations declining 2.77% per year over approximately 50 years (67% total decline nationally). The petition did not provide California-specific population trends, but the Department accessed readily available analyses of U.S. Breeding Bird Survey data for California, which also estimated a decline of 2.77% per year in the state from 1966–2022, and a steeper decline of 3.59% per year in more recent years (1993–2022). The petition notes that some estimates have stated that U.S. populations declined by 15.3% from 2012–2022. The petition describes significant population declines at regional scales which overlap with

California. The petition states that while more research is needed, juvenile survival is likely a limiting factor to LeConte's Thrasher population growth.

The petition highlights that the LeConte's Thrasher population in the San Joaquin Valley has sharply declined from 1944 to 2008. The species went from being described as "fairly common in suitable habitat" to rare and is extirpated from several San Joaquin Valley localities. The petition also notes that a LeConte's Thrasher population in the Coachella Valley has likely also been extirpated.

### **3.5 Threats**

This section summarizes the information in the petition regarding the factors affecting the ability of the species to survive and reproduce, and the degree and immediacy of threats (Fish & G. Code, § 2072.3; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 670.1, subd. (d)(1)).

The petition discusses threats to LeConte's Thrasher in the section title "Threats" on pages 33–66.

The petition discusses four main types of threats:

1. Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation
2. Direct and indirect anthropogenic mortality events
3. Disease and predation
4. Climate change

#### *3.5.1 Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation*

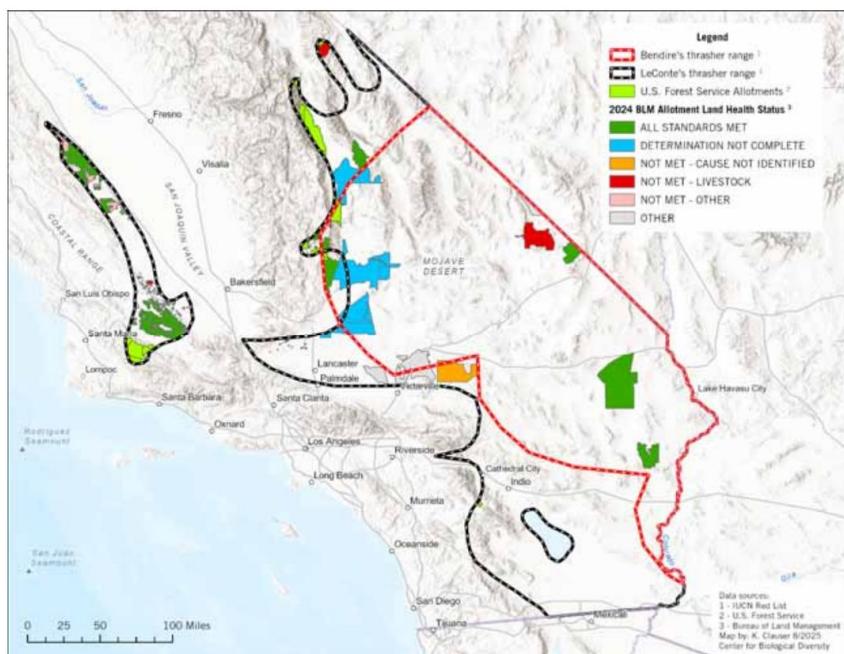
The petition states that habitat loss, degradation, and land conversion are major threats to LeConte's Thrasher persistence. The petition argues that because the habitats preferred by the species are also desired for anthropogenic uses, there is increased potential of harm due to impacts from anthropogenic sources. The petition lists nine (9) sources of habitat loss and degradation, which include: urban development, infrastructure development, agricultural development and pesticide use, livestock grazing, renewable energy production, mining activities, military activities, off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, and plant harvesting. These habitat threats cause changes in soil and plant cover, directly and indirectly remove breeding and nesting habitat, introduce invasive plant species, remove food resources, and cause changes in natural fire cycles. The petition suggests that urban development is a significant and immediate threat to LeConte's Thrasher, particularly for populations in Riverside County, Coachella Valley, and near Victorville. The petition also notes that LeConte's Thrasher is not tolerant of high-density development or agricultural development. Increased fire frequency may be of additional concern, due to the slow ability for desert vegetation to recover from disturbance. The petition also specifically notes that OHV-use within thrasher habitat

may cause noise and light pollution that influence breeding behaviors and habitat use. The petition argues that the effects of these threats make habitat unsuitable for supporting viable populations of LeConte's Thrasher in California.

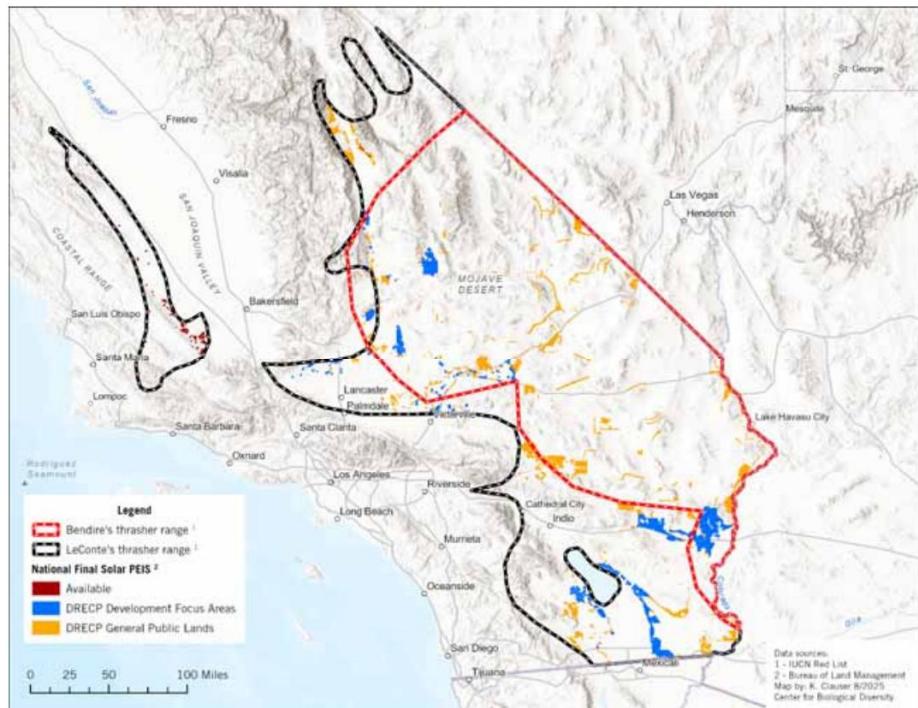
The petition states that agricultural development appears to be the strongest factor limiting habitat availability and population connectivity for the LeConte's Thrasher's San Joaquin Valley population. The petition also notes that while LeConte's Thrasher does not actively avoid all habitat with invasive plant species (a majority of LeConte's Thrasher occupied habitat (93%) has invasive annual plants present), there is a negative correlation between LeConte's Thrasher occupancy and high densities of invasive plants.

While not noted in the petition, the Department recognizes that oil and gas development projects may negatively impact LeConte's Thrasher habitat in the San Joaquin Valley populations (E. Tennant, CDFW, pers. comm.).

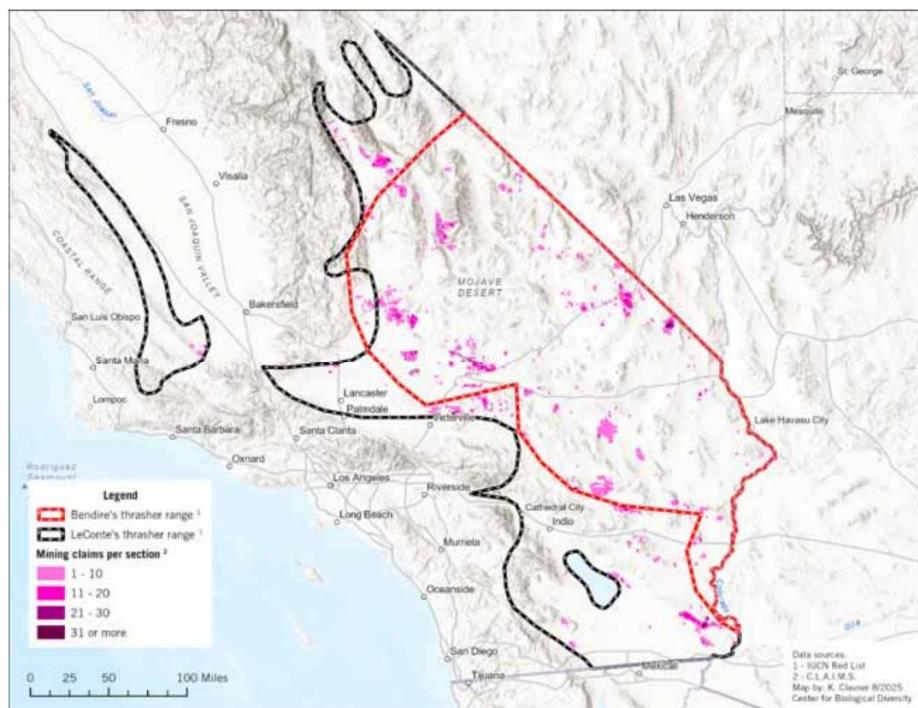
The petition argues that large portions of the species' range overlap with many of these threat sources (**Figures 6–9**) and most populations in California are threatened by these sources. The petition notes that development in LeConte's Thrasher habitat is expected to drastically increase (approximately 2.3x) by 2050. The petition states that these habitat threats have already led to a reduction in LeConte's Thrasher range, population declines, and extirpation of populations from areas with historically healthy populations.



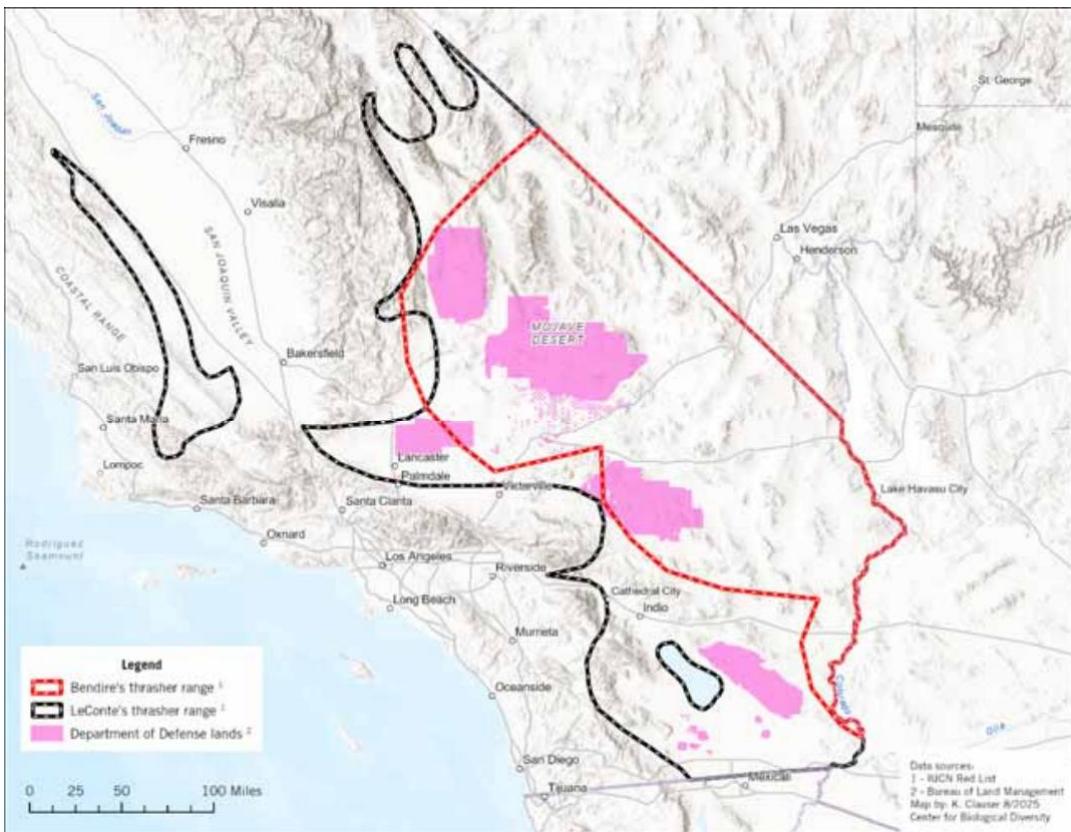
**Figure 6.** Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service grazing allotments in California within Bendire's Thrasher (red) and LeConte's Thrasher ranges (black). Figure 13 in the petition.



**Figure 7.** Lands available for solar development in California within Bendire's Thrasher (red) and LeConte's Thrasher ranges (black). Figure 14 in the petition.



**Figure 8.** Density of mining claims within Bendire's Thrasher (red) and LeConte's Thrasher ranges (black). Figure 15 in the petition.



**Figure 9.** Active military installations and testing ranges within Bendire's Thrasher (red) and LeConte's Thrasher ranges (black). Figure 16 in the petition.

### 3.5.2 Direct Mortality

The petition describes that in addition to changes in habitat quality and quantity, several of the threats listed above can cause direct mortality to individual LeConte's Thrashers.

The development of infrastructure projects such as roads, fences, and power lines may attract individuals to areas where they are at increased risk of fatal vehicle strikes. Livestock grazing may cause direct mortality to individuals through the disturbance and destruction of nesting birds. The petition states that the development of utility scale solar projects may attract birds to infrastructure and increase the risk of mortality via vehicle strikes and collisions with solar panels, fencing, and transmission lines. The petition also notes that there is a risk of vehicle strikes because roadsides and OHV trails may cause habitat changes (e.g., enhanced shrub nesting habitat) which could potentially attract birds to the areas of vehicle activity and put them at risk of vehicle strikes.

### 3.5.3 Disease and Predation

The petition notes that the impact of disease on LeConte's Thrasher is unknown but suggests there is potential for population level effects on the species based on impacts seen in other species. West Nile Virus has been detected in a deceased LeConte's Thrasher, and the disease is predicted to become more prevalent in the future.

Additionally, the petition states that while highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) has low infection rates in songbirds, there is potential for detrimental effects due to the disease's rapid spread and potential interactions with susceptible species that overlap in range and habitat-use with LeConte's Thrasher (e.g., corvids). The petition states that disease caused from other sources such as pesticide exposure from agriculture, exposure to toxic materials from mining activities, and exposure to dust containing pollutants (via grazing, OHV-use, and ground disturbing development) may have negative effects on the fitness of individuals, due to effects seen in other avian species.

The petition states that predation is not listed as a major threat in thrasher literature. However, the petition describes that predation is suspected of driving declining fledgling survival and nest success rates in thrasher species. Potential common predator species include Common Raven (*Corvus corax*), house cat (*Felis catus*), kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), and various raptors, snakes, and rodents. The petition notes that thrasher populations adjacent to developed areas may be at increased risk of predation by artificially inflated predator populations due to supplemental food and water resources (e.g., raven, coyote) and because urban-edge habitats provide opportunities for non-native species (e.g., house cat) to encounter Bendire's Thrasher habitat.

### 3.5.4 Climate Change

The petition states that the Desert Thrasher Working Group has identified climate change as "one of the top threats to desert thrashers." Climate change is likely to exacerbate many of the threats listed above, with potential effects on increased fire frequency as a specific concern. The petition discusses that changes in temperature and precipitation due to climate change are expected to influence individual survival and breeding and decreases in prey resource availability. Years of low precipitation have been associated with low fecundity and absence of breeding in some thrasher species. The petition notes that changes in temperatures may expose birds to conditions outside their thermal tolerances. The petition argues that LeConte's Thrasher may be especially susceptible to climate change affects due to low dispersal ability, reliance on certain plant species (e.g., Joshua tree), and potential inability for the species to shift their distributions to compensate with changing environmental conditions.

## 3.6 Existing Management

This section summarizes the information in the petition regarding the impact of existing management efforts on the species (Fish & G. Code, § 2072.3; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 670.1, subd. (d)(1)).

The petition discusses the impact of existing management efforts for LeConte's Thrasher in the section titled “Inadequacy of Existing Regulatory Mechanisms” on pages 66–84.

The petition describes the current regulatory mechanisms that may provide protection for LeConte's Thrasher, including some protection provided by occurring on habitat protected for other species that are listed under the Federal ESA and their designated Critical Habitat; designation as Sensitive Species by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM, see section 1.4 above); listing under the USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern List; listing as Tier 2 Mission Sensitive species under the Department of Defense's Partners in Flight program; consideration of the effects of Federal agency actions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); designation as Species of Special Concern by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife; designation as Species of Greatest Conservation Need under California's State Wildlife Action Plan; protections under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the California Environmental Quality Act.

The petition also describes the current management efforts for LeConte's Thrasher, including four Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and four joint HCP/Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCPs); natural resource management policy through the National Park Service and State Parks Department; resource management by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) through National Monuments and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; resource management on military lands implemented by Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans (INRMPs) and the Partners in Flight program; and the Department of Agriculture's Conservation Stewardship Program. The petition notes that the non-regulatory Desert Thrasher Working Group also conducts research and provides species management recommendations for LeConte's Thrasher and other thrasher species; these efforts include conservation strategies and survey protocols for LeConte's Thrasher.

According to the petition, existing regulatory protections and management actions are insufficient to manage the species, as evidenced by the decline in species' range and abundances despite these mechanisms. The petition states that many of the regulatory policies and management efforts have limited impact on the species because of their limited geographic scope compared to the more expansive range of the LeConte's Thrasher (e.g., management activities on military lands or protections provided by national parks only cover a small portion of the species' range). Furthermore, the petition states that regulations and policy toward non-listed species on federal lands

may be changed with political climates and do not provide long-term protection or management. The petition also argues that protections for species provided by HCPs and NCCPs often fail as the petitioner believes they are used as exemptions from ESA and habitat protection policies, are poorly monitored for effectiveness, and as such are not useful for non-listed species. The petition states that the different “sensitive species” designations (including the SSC and SGCN designations) by the Department and federal agencies has not provided significant protection for the species. The petition argues that these “inadequacies” of regulation mechanisms and management highlight that protections as a CESA-listed species are necessary for the species’ survival.

### **3.7 Future Management**

This section summarizes the information in the petition regarding suggestions for future management (Fish & G. Code, § 2072.3; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 670.1, subd. (d)(1)).

The petition makes suggestions for future management in the section entitled “Recommendations for Future Management” on pages 85–87.

The petition recommends two (2) priority management and recovery actions for LeConte’s Thrasher:

1. Protect LeConte’s Thrasher under CESA.
2. Implement solar project guidelines developed by the Desert Thrasher Working Group.

The petition recommends nine (9) additional conservation actions and strategies for LeConte’s Thrasher:

1. Compile essential thrasher habitat requirements.
2. Enhance monitoring efforts.
3. Identify and prioritize research to address key data gaps.
4. Increase funding for research and monitoring.
5. Identify areas of climate resiliency.
6. Develop beneficial management practices for thrasher habitat.
7. Habitat restoration projects.
8. Encourage stakeholders to consider thrashers in planning and increase awareness.
9. Strengthen regulation and enforcement of off-road vehicles.

### **3.8 Availability and Sources of Information**

This section summarizes the information in the petition regarding availability and sources of information (Fish & G. Code, § 2072.3; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 670.1, subd. (d)(1)).

The petition cites an extensive list of sources on pages 89–120. The Department referenced additional literature when developing this petition evaluation (see Literature Cited section).

### **4 OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO THE DEPARTMENT**

Pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2073.5, the Department also evaluates petitions in relation to other relevant information the Department possesses or receives.

The Department possesses some additional information related to LeConte's Thrasher. The Department evaluated readily available information and expertise from CDFW species experts relating to threats, detection records, and project survey reports. The Department also reviewed U.S. Breeding Bird Survey data analyses for California conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (available at <https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/>); this information is included in the Abundance and Population Trend section.

To the extent the Department was able to review other relevant information in its possession as it relates to the petition, the Department concluded that none of the additional information constitutes countervailing information that wholly undercuts the conclusions in the petition at this juncture in the listing process.

If the Commission accepts the petition for consideration, all reasonable attempts will be made by the Department to notify affected and interested parties and to solicit data and comments on the petitioned action (Fish & G. Code, § 2074.4). At that time, the Department will commence a review of the status of the species and produce a written peer-reviewed report, based upon the best scientific information available to the Department, which indicates whether the petitioned action is warranted (Fish & G. Code, § 2074.6).

### **5 SUFFICIENCY OF SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION AND RECOMMENDATION TO THE COMMISSION**

The Department evaluated the petition components set forth in Fish and Game Code section 2072.3 and California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 670.1, subdivision (d)(1) for sufficiency of information pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2073.5.

Based upon the information contained in the petition and other relevant information, the Department determined there is sufficient information to indicate that the petitioned action may be warranted (Fish & G. Code § 2073.5). Therefore, the Department recommends the Commission accept the petition for further consideration under CESA. If the Commission accepts the petition for further consideration, the Department will commence a review of the status of the species at that time pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2074.6 and California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 670.1, subdivision (f).

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This petition evaluation was prepared by Austin Roy in the Department's Wildlife Branch, CESA Unit.

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## **PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Erin Tennant. 2025. California Department of Fish and Wildlife.