



**Humboldt
Redwood™**

**Bald Eagle Annual Report
2015**

February 1, 2016



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PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Title: Bald Eagle HCP Monitoring

Subject Area: Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) monitoring

Date initiated: March 1999

End Date: Ongoing

Project Manager: Sal Chinnici, Manager, Forest Sciences

Executive Summary

Per the 2005 Minor Modification of the Bald Eagle Conservation Plan of the HCP (Appendix I), property-wide focused surveys for bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) are conducted on a five-year cycle, beginning with 2009. Therefore, property-wide surveys were conducted in 2009 (HRC 2010), and again in 2014 (HRC 2015). No property-wide focused surveys are conducted in the intervening years (i.e. from 2010 to 2013, or in 2015).

During years when property-wide surveys are not conducted, habitat evaluations and localized searches of potential bald eagle habitat are conducted for all Timber Harvesting Plans (THPs). Given that 2015 was a year without focused surveys, we are once again providing a brief summary report of any other observed bald eagle activity and any associated follow-up survey information.

During the 2015 bald eagle breeding season there were observations of bald eagles during: 1) surveys for golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), 2) osprey (*Pandion haliaeetus*) nest surveys, and 3) nest monitoring surveys done at the Catfish Lake bald eagle nest. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs. None of the bald eagle observations were within 0.5-mile of THP operations.

No changes in monitoring strategies are recommended at this time. The next property-wide bald eagle survey is scheduled for the 2019 breeding season.

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SUMMARY

As per the 2005 Minor Modification of the Bald Eagle Conservation Plan of the HCP (Appendix D), property-wide surveys were conducted in 2009, and again in 2014, and no systematic, focused bald eagle surveys were conducted in 2015 on HRC property within the bald eagle survey area. Property-wide focused surveys will next be conducted during 2019. Given that 2015 was a year without focused surveys, we are providing a brief summary report of any observed bald eagle activity and any associated follow-up survey information.

Briefly, as review, in 2014 property-wide focused surveys for bald eagles and their nests were conducted of the HRC/Wildlife Agency agreed-upon survey area of the HRC ownership, using both ground-based and helicopter survey techniques. The survey area was divided into 11 units by watershed. Ten biologists and biological technicians conducted a total of 70 individual survey efforts of the survey units, totaling approximately 277 observer-hours, completed over 25 days between 17 February and 11 April, 2014.

There were a total of 16 observations of individuals or pairs of bald eagles during the 2014 focused survey; including foraging eagles, and nesting eagles at the known nest at Catfish Lake near College of the Redwoods, and a newly discovered nest near High Rock Conservation Camp along the Avenue of the Giants. None of the 2014 bald eagle observations were within 0.5-mile of active THP operations.

This 2015 report summarizes any bald eagle detections incidental to other species surveys, and follow-up surveys conducted in response to bald eagle detections gained while involved in other activities.

During the 2015 bald eagle breeding season there were observations of bald eagles during: 1) surveys for golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), 2) osprey (*Pandion haliaeetus*) nest surveys, and 3) nest monitoring surveys done at the Catfish Lake bald eagle nest. No bald eagles were observed on Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) surveys. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs. There were incidental observations of bald eagles near Scotia along the Eel River. None of the bald eagle observations were within 0.5-mile of THP operations. Thus, detections did not trigger the requirements of item # 5 of the modified HCP language, and are presented here for informational purposes only.

INTRODUCTION

The bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*; BAEA), a covered species under HRC's HCP, had been listed as a federally threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act but was delisted in 2007. It is also protected pursuant to the Bald Eagle Protection Act. The bald eagle is listed as endangered under the California State Endangered Species Act, is a Board of Forestry Sensitive Species, and a California Fully Protected Species.

METHODS

The modified HCP language concerning bald eagles includes revised survey guidelines requiring:

- Focused surveys conducted at five-year intervals starting with 2009.
- Habitat evaluations and nest searches for THPs located within potential foraging habitat or anywhere on the property where suitable nesting habitat may occur.
- Looking for bald eagles while conducting forestry-related activities or while surveying for other species (e.g. peregrine falcon, osprey, and golden eagle).

Methods for THP habitat evaluations and localized searches of potential nesting habitat are discussed in the HCP language contained in Appendix I. Survey methods for Peregrine falcons, osprey, and golden eagles are discussed in the annual reports for each of these species.

RESULTS

During the 2015 bald eagle breeding season there were observations of bald eagles as a result of: 1) surveys for golden eagles, 2) osprey nest surveys, and 3) nest monitoring surveys done at the Catfish Lake bald eagle nest. No bald eagles were observed on Peregrine falcon surveys. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs.

There were incidental observations of bald eagles near Scotia along the Eel River. None of these detections were within 0.5 mile of active THP units or helicopter operations and flight corridors.

Golden eagle survey observations:

In 2015, golden eagle surveys were conducted for the Mountain View THP (1-13-035 HUM). Three golden eagle survey stations (74 – 76) were used to survey the THP and surrounding buffer areas. A total of six visits were completed to the stations. No golden eagle activity was observed on the surveys; however, bald eagles (three adults and one sub-adult) were detected at station 74 on the first survey (15 January). The observer noted that they were likely to be flying from the Mad River drainage over into the Yager Creek drainage for foraging. No nesting behavior was observed. No other bald eagle observations occurred on golden eagle surveys in 2015.

Osprey survey observations:

Bald eagles were observed during the 2015 osprey surveys for the McCloud – Shaw THP (1-12-110 HUM). Bald eagles were observed to be nesting again at the Catfish Lake site to the west of HRC property near the College of the Redwoods. Similar to 2014, 2015 surveys indicated that at least one eaglet resulted from this nest.

No bald eagles were observed during osprey surveys for the Hibachi THP (1-12-104 HUM) in 2015. The new bald eagle nest found near High Rock along the Eel River during bald eagle surveys conducted in 2014 did not appear to be occupied in 2015. In 2014, although the bald eagles appeared to be tending to the nest throughout the season, no nestlings or fledglings were observed on any of our surveys, indicating that nesting was not initiated, or the nesting attempt may have failed.

Catfish Lake nest monitoring:

Two monitoring visits were made to a single observation point to check on the 2015 location and status of the Catfish Lake bald eagle nest.

1. On 21 May, 2015 the nest was observed for approximately one hour. One adult and one eaglet were observed.
2. Another visit was conducted on 9 June, 2015. The single eaglet was observed to still be on the nest on this date.

Observations incidental to other activities or detections:

Occasional reports of bald eagles along the Eel River between Rio Dell and south Scotia prompted a follow-up survey on 11 June, 2015. The biologist surveyed the area along the river between the Highway 101 bridges for approximately four hours. During the survey, two adults and one sub-adult bald eagles were observed flying, and perching along the river, generally between Monument Creek and Twin Creek. No nests or nesting behavior was observed. Since the Rio Dell nest has not been active since 2013 (Hunt-von Arb, pers. comm.), and the High Rock nest was not occupied in 2015, it is possible that the observed eagles are the pair that has nested, or been attempting to nest, along this stretch of the Eel for the last several years.

DISCUSSION

During the 2015 bald eagle breeding season there were observations of bald eagles as a result of surveys for other raptor species. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs. There were incidental observations of bald eagles near Scotia along the Eel River. None of these detections were within 0.5 mile of active THP units or helicopter operations and flight corridors.

The continued activity of bald eagles along the Eel River relatively late in the breeding season makes the discovery of additional new nests a strong possibility. At the very least, bald eagles seem to be a more common resident in the Eel River Valley compared to 5 or 10 years ago when they were rarely observed in the summer and early fall.

In addition, due to observations of the Catfish Lake nest, HRC personnel are aware of an increased presence of bald eagles on HRC property near Humboldt Bay (e.g. Elk River, Salmon Creek), which could lead to future nesting attempts on or adjacent to HRC property.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Current survey methods have been successful at detecting bald eagles during both breeding and non-breeding seasons. Known nest sites will be monitored in 2015. No changes in monitoring strategies are recommended at this time. The next property-wide bald eagle survey is scheduled for the 2019 breeding season.

LITERATURE CITED

Humboldt Redwood Company, LLC. 2010. 2009 Humboldt Redwood Company Habitat Conservation Plan Bald Eagle Annual Report. 1 February 2010. 17 pp.

Humboldt Redwood Company, LLC. 2015. 2014 Humboldt Redwood Company Habitat Conservation Plan Bald Eagle Annual Report. 1 February 2015. 20 pp.

Hunt-von Arb, S. Personal communication via email. 9 April 2014.

APPENDIX 1

APRIL 2005 MINOR MODIFICATION TO HCP LANGUAGE

6.4.2.1 Surveys

1. Beginning in 2009 and at 5-year intervals thereafter, HRC shall conduct property-wide surveys for bald eagles and their nests in all suitable nesting habitat (i.e., old-growth or residual stands with trees more than 40 inches in diameter) that is located within 0.5 mile of suitable foraging habitat along Class I waters. HRC shall depict on a map the extent of suitable foraging habitat mutually agreed upon by HRC, USFWS, and DFG. This map shall be reviewed and revised as needed, at no more than five-year intervals and/or concurrent with review and evaluation required under HCP Section 6.4.3.

2. Although most bald eagle nests are likely to occur within 0.5 mile of foraging habitat, they could potentially occur anywhere in the “Plan Area” where nesting habitat is suitable. Therefore, throughout the Plan Area HRC shall evaluate all THP units, areas within 0.5 mile from unit boundaries, and areas within 0.5 miles of all helicopter flight corridors where helicopters may fly below 2640 feet above ground elevation for the existence of suitable nesting habitat, and disclose where suitable nesting habitat occurs at the time of THP submittal. If suitable habitat is found, HRC shall conduct a localized THP search of such bald eagle nesting habitat for nests and eagles in the current or immediately previous breeding season (January 15 to August 15), and include localized THP search results in the THP.

3. Property-wide surveys and localized THP searches may be conducted from the ground or air but only under clear viewing conditions and in calm weather. Repeated float trips down Class I waters that provide potential foraging habitat or surveys conducted by airplane or helicopter to search for adult birds and nests may be necessary. All aerial surveys shall be designed with the assistance of the USFWS or DFG to avoid the possibility of disturbing eagles at unknown nest sites. Survey routes, time spent surveying drainages and/or searching THP areas, and names of observers shall be among the data collected on each property-wide survey and localized THP search. A complete property-wide survey or localized THP search consists of an ocular search for eagles and their nests as described above and includes all follow-up visits and reporting requirements if eagles are observed.

4. During years in which property-wide surveys are conducted, three complete surveys for eagles and their nests shall be completed during the bald eagle survey period (February 15 to May 1). Surveys shall be separated by at least 14 days. HRC may confer with DFG or USFWS if weather or other circumstances beyond its control may prevent HRC from completing surveys as described.

5. If at any time within 0.5 mile of the THP units or within 0.5 miles of helicopter operations and flight corridors, adult bald eagles are observed engaged in courtship or nesting behavior (e.g., aerial courtship displays, mating, transporting nest materials, nest building or nesting), or if adult bald eagles are observed during

the period March 15 to August 15, DFG or USFWS shall be notified immediately and additional follow-up visits shall be conducted for each adult sighted to determine if eagles are nesting. This determination of nesting may be aided by observing the eagle's behavior, location, direction of flight, or other factors.

a. Two follow-up visits shall be initiated and completed as soon as possible and within 72 hours of the initial adult bald eagle observation. These visits shall consist of a minimum of 2-to 3-hour ground surveys from one or two locations that achieve complete coverage and viewing of the area where the eagle was observed. One morning visit shall be completed between sunrise and 11 a.m., and one late afternoon visit shall be completed between 2 p.m. and sunset if surveyed in January or February and between 3 p.m. and sunset if surveyed on or after March 1. HRC shall immediately confer with and receive verbal or written concurrence from DFG or USFWS if weather or other circumstances beyond its control prevent initiation and completion of follow-up visits as described above within 72 hours of the initial adult eagle observation.

b. Results of all follow-up visits shall be submitted to USFWS and DFG within 72 hours of completion of the visits.

6. If courtship or nesting behavior is observed during surveys or any other time, HRC shall immediately suspend timber operations within 0.5 mile of the location of this behavior. Courtship and nesting behavior includes, but is not limited to: aerial courtship displays, mating, transporting nest materials, nest building, and nesting. Operations shall not commence or resume within 0.5 mile of the location of courtship or nesting behavior until all follow-up visits have been completed, the follow-up visit results have been provided to USFWS and DFG, and USFWS or DFG has provided written concurrence.

7. If a bald eagle nest is located, HRC shall immediately suspend and/or not commence timber operations within 0.5 mile of the nest location and notify DFG, USFWS, and CDF and complete a site-specific consultation with DFG or USFWS.

8. Documentation (e.g., survey forms, maps, and written summary) of results of property-wide surveys and follow-up visits shall be provided to USFWS and DFG annually, upon request, and as otherwise stated above.

9. Any personnel that may survey for bald eagles and their nests (as per Item 1 above), and any personnel that may evaluate THPs for the existence of suitable bald eagle nesting habitat or conduct a localized THP search of such habitat for nests and eagles (as per Item 2 above), shall be trained to recognize bald eagles, their nests and nesting behaviors, and other signs indicating their presence, and shall undergo specific training to this end as outlined by HRC in a brief training plan

that is reviewed and approved by DFG and/or USFWS. In addition, all field personnel shall be directed to report all sightings of eagles or nests to HRC's wildlife biologist or their designee.