



**Humboldt
Redwood™**

Bald Eagle Annual Report

2019

February 1, 2020



Cover photo: Adult bald eagle perched on High Rock nest 2014 (photo credit HRC Forest Sciences).

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, Director, Forest Sciences

Executive Summary

In 2019, property-wide focused surveys for bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and their nests were conducted on 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. Nine biologists and biological technicians conducted a total of 94 individual survey efforts of the survey units, completed over 31 days between 18 February and 18 June 2019.

During the focused survey we observed a total of eight observations of individual bald eagles involved in foraging, circling and perched behaviors. No nesting behavior was observed during the surveys. None of the bald eagle observations were within 0.5-mile of active THP operations.

As per the 2005 Minor Modification of the Bald Eagle Conservation Plan of the HCP, property-wide surveys are to be conducted on a five-year cycle, beginning in 2009. No focused surveys were conducted from 2015 to 2018. Habitat evaluations and localized searches of potential bald eagle habitat were conducted for every Timber Harvesting Plan (THP) during the period between property-wide surveys.

The 2019 focused survey effort is the third under the five-year cycle approach. This report provides a summary of the surveys accomplished, any observed bald eagle activity, and any associated follow-up survey information. The next property-wide bald eagle survey is scheduled for the 2024 breeding season. No changes in monitoring strategies are recommended at this time.

2019 PROJECT SUMMARY

As per the 2005 Minor Modification of the Bald Eagle Conservation Plan of the HCP (Appendix 1), property-wide focused bald eagle surveys were conducted in 2019. This 2019 report summarizes the property wide focused surveys, any bald eagle detections incidental to other species surveys, any follow-up surveys conducted in response to bald eagle detections, and the results of the habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs.

The 2019 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 (Appendix 2), using both ground-based and helicopter survey techniques. The survey area was divided into 11 units by watershed. Nine biologists and biological technicians conducted a total of 94 individual survey efforts of the survey units, totaling approximately 250 observer-hours, completed over 31 days between 18 February and 18 June 2019.

During the focused survey we obtained a total of eight observations of individual bald eagles involved in foraging, circling and perched behaviors. No nesting behavior was observed during the surveys. None of the bald eagle observations were within 0.5-mile of active THP operations.

We did not observe any bald eagles during nest monitoring surveys at the Catfish Lake or High Rock known bald eagle nests. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches conducted throughout the 2019 breeding season on a total of 29 THPs.

Surveyors also track bald eagle detections incidental to other species surveys. During the 2019 bald eagle breeding season there were two incidental observations of bald eagles during surveys for golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), and one bald eagle observation during osprey (*Pandion haliaeetus*) nest surveys. There were no bald eagle observations during Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) nest surveys. The three bald eagle observations incidental to other surveys were not within 0.5-mile of any active THP operations.

In addition to the property-wide survey observations and the observations on other species surveys there were four additional incidental observations of bald eagles across the HRC property in 2019. These observations occurred in Elk River, Larabee Creek, Yager Creek, and the mainstem Eel River. None of these bald eagle observations indicated nesting behavior within

0.5-mile of active 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.

Project Manager, Primary Author



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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

As per the 2005 bald eagle minor modification to the HRC HCP, property-wide surveys for bald eagles and their nests are to occur 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 is to depict on a map the extent of suitable foraging habitat mutually agreed upon by HRC, USFWS, and CDFW. This map is to be reviewed and revised as needed for use on the property-wide surveys.

The survey area was divided into 11 units by watershed, from Freshwater Creek at the north end of the HRC property, to Larabee Creek, the Upper Eel River, and the East Branch North Fork Mattole on the southeast, south, and southwest, respectively (Table 1). We used a team of nine different surveyors, comprised of biologists and biological technicians, all trained in eagle survey techniques and eagle identification.

Three complete surveys for eagles and their nests were completed during the bald eagle survey period (15 February to 1 May, extended to 30 June), with surveys of the individual units separated by at least 14 days. HRC has the option to confer with CDFW or USFWS if weather or other circumstances beyond its control prevent surveys from being completed as described. The spring of 2019 had relatively wet weather and surveys could not be completed within the required period. We conferred with CDFW for an extension and they concurred with our request for a two-month extension to complete surveys (email message from Susan Sniado, CDFW, 3 May 2019).

In 2019 we used both ground-based and helicopter survey techniques. Biologists conducting ground-based surveys traversed the surveys units via pickup trucks, ATVs, and on foot, and

Table 1. 2019 Property-wide Bald Eagle Survey Summary (bald eagle observations in bold).

Bald Eagle Survey Unit	Survey 1 (dates)	Bald Eagle Obs (#)	Survey 2 (dates)	Bald Eagle Obs (#)	Survey 3 (dates)	Bald Eagle Obs (#)
Freshwater	4 surveys (2/18, 2/19, 2/21, 2/22)	Yes (1) (Garfield School)	Helicopter survey (4/16)	No	1 survey (6/7)	No
Elk River (including Catfish Lake Nest)	5 surveys (2/20, 2/21)	No	2 surveys (4/24) Helicopter (4/16)	No	2 surveys (6/13, 6/14)	No
Yager/Lawrence	6 surveys (2/18, 2/19, 2/20, 2/28)	Yes (1) (The Pass)	4 surveys (4/17, 4/25, 4/26, 4/29)	No	4 surveys (6/6, 6/10, 6/14)	No
Van Duzen	3 surveys (2/28, 3/5)	No	2 surveys (4/17, 5/7)	No	1 survey (6/11)	No
Lower Eel (Larabee Creek North)	2 surveys (2/21)	Yes (1) (Mouth of Jordan Creek)	5 surveys (5/3, 5/6, 5/7, 5/19)	No	4 survey (6/11, 6/12)	Yes (2) Pepperwood, Scotia
Larabee Creek	6 surveys (2/18, 2/19, 2/21, 3/11)	No	2 surveys (5/6, 5/7)	No	3 surveys (6/10, 6/11, 6/12)	No
Upper Eel	4 surveys (2/22, 3/26)	No	4 surveys (4/28, 4/30, 5/2, 5/3)	Yes (1) (Confluence of Main and SF Eel)	6 surveys (6/7, 6/11, 6/12)	Yes (2) Perrott Creek
Bear River	2 surveys (2/22, 2/28)	No	2 surveys (5/10)	No	3 surveys (6/10, 6/11, 6/18)	No
Peaked Creek	1 survey (2/22)	No	1 survey (5/2)	No	1 survey (6/18)	No
North Fork Mattole	1 survey (3/18)	No	1 survey (5/10)	No	1 survey (6/10)	No
East Branch North Fork Mattole	1 survey (3/19)	No	1 survey (5/17)	No	1 survey (6/10)	No
Sonoma	1 survey (3/25)	No	1 survey (5/2)	No	1 survey (6/17)	No

stopped at observation points affording good views of the survey area. Binoculars and spotting scopes were used to scan the riparian zones, upslope forest habitat, and the sky for sign of eagles. Helicopter surveys of survey units were incorporated as shown in Table 1.

Methods for THP habitat evaluations and localized searches of potential nesting habitat are discussed in the HCP language contained in Appendix 1.

RESULTS

During the 2019 bald eagle breeding season there were a total of eight observations of bald eagles during the property-wide focused surveys (Table 2), three observations of bald eagles as a result of golden eagle and osprey nest surveys, and four additional incidental observations of bald eagles across the HRC property in Elk River, Larabee Creek, Yager Creek, and the mainstem Eel River.

No detections during the property-wide focused survey were within 0.5-mile of active THP units, helicopter operations, or flight corridors. The known High Rock and Catfish Lake nests were observed during 2019 while conducting the focused surveys. There was no bald eagle activity at either nest during the 2019 season. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs.

Table 2. 2019 Bald Eagle Property Wide Focused Survey Observations Summary.

Location	Date	Observation
Freshwater (Garfield School to Graham Gulch)	2/21/2019	Adult circling
Yager/Lawrence (The Pass)	2/22/2019	Adult circling, direct flight
Lower Eel (Mouth of Jordan Creek)	2/21/2019	Sub-Adult circling, undulating
Lower Eel (Pepperwood on Eel River)	6/11/2019	Adult, low flight, audio
Upper Eel (Confluence of mainstem Eel and SF Eel)	4/28/2019	Adult circling
Upper Eel (Downstream of High Rock Nest)	6/11/2019	Adult direct flight-flying downstream along the Eel River
Upper Eel (Mouth of Perrott Creek)	6/11/2019	Adult circling
Upper Eel (Scotia-Mouth of Monument Creek)	6/12/2019	Adult perched

Nest monitoring:

The Catfish Lake historic bald eagle nest is not on HRC property, and thus is only monitored completely when operations are scheduled within disturbance minimization buffers, which was not the case in 2019. However, the Catfish Lake nest had three visits throughout the property-wide focused surveys. Although the nest appeared to be in good condition no bald eagle observations were obtained at Catfish Lake. Similarly, the High Rock nest was observed with no resulting activity seen associated with the nest. There was one adult bald eagle seen downstream of nest location in mid-June.

DISCUSSION

During the 2019 bald eagle survey period, property-wide focused surveys for bald eagles and their nests were conducted of suitable foraging/nesting habitat on the HRC ownership, using primarily ground-based survey techniques, but also utilizing helicopter surveys. It was a large effort in terms of time and manpower compared to helicopter-only surveys as conducted in previous years. Overall, nine biologists and biological technicians conducted a total of 94 individual survey efforts of the 11 survey units, totaling approximately 250 observer-hours, and completed over 31 days.

During the 2019 bald eagle breeding season there were three observations of bald eagles as a result of surveys for other raptor species (golden eagle, osprey). There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs. There were incidental observations of bald eagles in four drainages, however no nesting behavior was observed.

Continued activity of bald eagles along the Eel River relatively late in the breeding season during the 2014 – 2019 period suggests that discovery of additional new nests is a 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.

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. Property-wide surveys of potential foraging habitat will be conducted in 2024, including monitoring of known nest sites. No changes in monitoring strategies are recommended at this time.

REFERENCES

CDFW. 2019. Email message from Susan Sniado to John Peters (USFWS), and Sal Chinnici, Brad Mauney, and Aaron Griffith (HRC). Regarding extension of survey period for property-wide focused surveys for bald eagles. 3 May 2019.

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.

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.

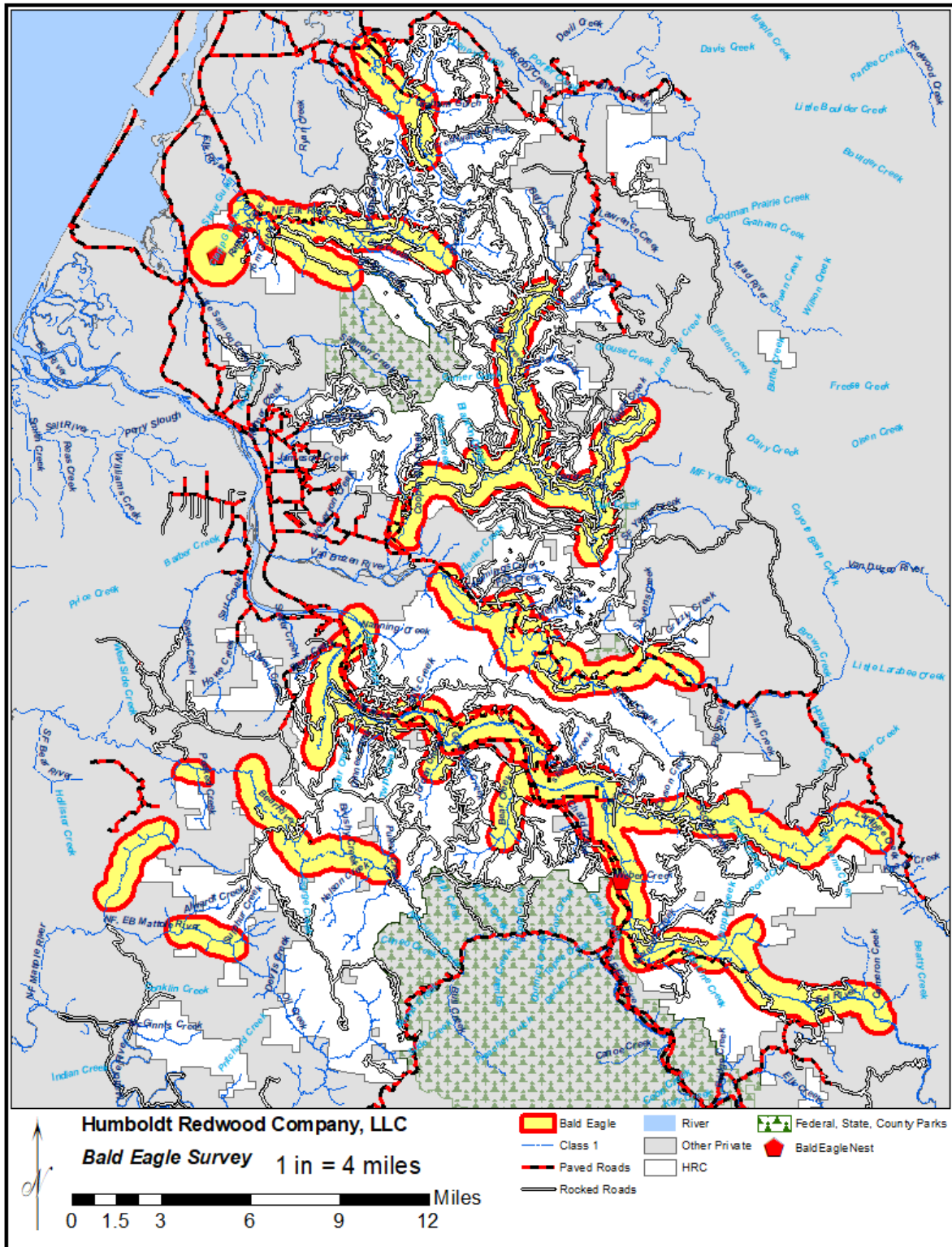
7. If a bald eagle nest is located, HRC shall immediately suspend and/or not commence timber operations within 0.5 mile of the nest location and notify DFG, USFWS, and CDF and complete a site-specific consultation with DFG or USFWS.

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.

APPENDIX 2



MAP OF HUMBOLDT REDWOOD COMPANY BALD EAGLE SURVEY AREA