



**Humboldt
Redwood™**

Bald Eagle Summary Report 2013

February 1, 2014



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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, Forest Science Manager

Executive Summary

As per the 2005 Minor Modification of the Bald Eagle Conservation Plan of the HCP (Appendix I), property-wide surveys were conducted in 2009 (HRC 2010) and no focused surveys have been conducted from 2010 to 2013 for bald eagles on HRC property within the bald eagle survey area. Property-wide focused surveys will be conducted again in 2014. Given that 2013 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 2013 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 a follow-up visit to a suspected juvenile bald eagle sighting near Larabee Creek. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for Timber Harvesting Plans (THPs). There were incidental observations of bald eagles near Scotia related to a known nest near Rio Dell. 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 2014 breeding season.

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SUMMARY

As per the 2005 Minor Modification of the Bald Eagle Conservation Plan of the HCP (Appendix I), property-wide surveys were conducted in 2009 (2009 HRC Bald Eagle Annual Report), and no systematic, focused bald eagle surveys have been conducted from 2010 to 2013 on HRC property within the bald eagle survey area. Property-wide focused surveys will be conducted during the 2014 survey period. Given that 2013 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.

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.
- In addition, HRC will continue to look for bald eagles while conducting forestry-related activities or while surveying for other species (e.g. peregrine falcon, osprey, and golden eagle).

This 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 2013 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, near College of the Redwoods. No bald eagles were observed on Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) surveys, or on a follow-up visit to a suspected juvenile bald eagle sighting on Larabee Creek. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs. There were incidental observations of bald eagles near Scotia related to a known nest near Rio Dell. 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 also listed as endangered under the California State Endangered Species Act, is a Board of Forestry Sensitive Species, and a California Fully Protected Species.

METHODS

No focused property-wide surveys for bald eagles were conducted in 2013. Focused surveys of the HRC bald eagle survey area will take place in 2014. 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 2013 bald eagle breeding season there were observations of bald eagles as a result of: 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, or on a follow-up visit to a suspected juvenile bald eagle sighting on Larabee Creek. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs. There were incidental observations of bald eagles near Scotia related to a known nest near Rio Dell. None of these detections were within 0.5 mile of active THP units or helicopter operations and flight corridors.

Golden eagle survey observations: A single bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) was observed from golden eagle station 65 on 16 January 2013, perched near the bottom of the Chase Ranch prairie, on the east side of Bear River. The surveyor noted that the bald eagle was likely to be foraging along Bear River. No nesting behavior was noted.

Osprey survey observations: One bald eagle was observed during the 2013 osprey surveys, on the McCloud – Shaw THP surveys. The observation was of an adult bald eagle on the Catfish Lake nest, adjacent to HRC property near the College of the Redwoods. This nest was occupied this year and was observed to fledge one juvenile bald eagle (see below).

Catfish Lake nest monitoring: Two monitoring visits were made to a single observation point to check on the 2013 location and status of the Catfish Lake bald eagle nest.

1. On 30 April, 2013 the nest was observed for approximately one hour. A large stick nest was observed in the snag-top old growth redwood tree that was a perch or pilot tree for the 2005 nest. An adult female bald eagle was observed on the nest, possibly incubating eggs, or with small nestlings.
2. A follow-up visit was conducted on 3 July, 2013 to determine reproductive success. The nest was observed for approximately two hours. The adult female was observed feeding with a single juvenile, and the adult male was later observed perched nearby. Therefore the final status of this nest for 2013 was that of a nesting pair with one fledged juvenile.

Rio Dell nest: As we first reported in 2010, observations of adult bald eagles during the breeding season indicated that there may have been a nest or nesting attempt in the vicinity of Rio Dell, California, just north of Scotia along the Eel River. Adult bald eagles were seen several times in 2010 along the Eel River near Rio Dell, but no courtship, nesting behavior, or nests have been observed. Observations typically occurred during osprey or peregrine falcon surveys near the Scotia Bluffs, and involved interspecific territorial interactions.

Anecdotal information offered by local residents suggested a possible nest, including the description of a possible nest tree, on the south side of the Eel River west of the Belleview area of Rio Dell. This potential nest site is not on HRC property and we were unable to confirm a nest location, or nesting status in 2010 or 2011, although efforts were limited. Incidental bald eagle observations along the Eel River near Rio Dell were also recorded in 2012. During the fall of 2012 we were contacted by a resident of Rio Dell who provided us with more specific information on the location of the possible nest. The location of the Rio Dell nest was confirmed

during the 2013 breeding season, during which the nest may have failed (Hunt-von Arb, pers. comm.).

Follow-up surveys: In late April of 2013 the HRC forestry crew working near Larabee Creek and Balcom Creek observed a large raptor that they thought may have been a juvenile bald eagle. An HRC wildlife biologist conducted a follow-up visit on 13 May, lasting approximately 3 hours, during which they covered potential nesting and foraging habitat in the area of the detection. The only raptor observation was that of a red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) flying over the general area. No adult or juvenile bald eagles were observed.

DISCUSSION

During the 2013 bald eagle breeding season there were observations of bald eagles as a result of surveys for other raptor species. A single follow-up visit was conducted to a suspected juvenile bald eagle sighting, with negative results. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs. There were incidental observations of bald eagles near Scotia related to a known nest near Rio Dell. 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 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. No changes in monitoring strategies are recommended at this time. The next property-wide bald eagle survey is scheduled for the 2014 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.

Hunt-von Arb, S. Personal communication via email. 24 April 2013.

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.