



**Humboldt
Redwood™**

**Bald Eagle Survey Report
2014**

February 1, 2015



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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

In 2014, 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. Ten biologists and biological technicians conducted a total of 70 individual survey efforts of the survey units, 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 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 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 (Appendix I), property-wide surveys are to be conducted on a five-year cycle, beginning in 2009. No focused surveys were conducted from 2010 to 2013. 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 2014 focused survey effort is the second 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 2019 breeding season. No changes in monitoring strategies are recommended at this time.

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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 also listed as endangered under the California State Endangered Species Act, is a Board of Forestry Sensitive Species, and a California Fully Protected Species.

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 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 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 (Appendix D), property-wide surveys are to be conducted on a five-year cycle, beginning in 2009. No focused surveys were conducted from 2010 to 2013. 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 2014 focused survey effort is the second 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.

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 property-wide survey map (Appendix II) was sent to the USFWS and CDFW via email on 14 January, 2014, prior to the initiation of surveys, for agency review and comment. Having received no comments or proposed edits to the suitable nesting habitat survey area, we used the existing map to guide our survey effort.

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 10 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), with surveys of the individual units separated by at least 14 days. Although 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 2014 had relatively mild weather and all surveys were completed within the required period.

In 2014 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 stopped at observation points affording good views of the survey area. Binoculars and spotting scopes were used to scan the riparian zones, forests, and sky for sign of eagles.

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,

Table 1. 2014 Bald Eagle Survey Summary

Bald Eagle Survey Unit	Survey 1 (dates)	Bald Eagle Obs	Survey 2 (dates)	Bald Eagle Obs	Survey 3 (dates)	Bald Eagle Obs
Freshwater	2 surveys (2/26)	No	2 surveys (3/19, 3/20)	No	Helicopter survey (4/7)	No
Elk River (including Catfish Lake Nest)	8 surveys (2/21, 2/26, 2/28)	Yes (NF Elk, Catfish Lake)	4 surveys (3/18, 3/20, 3/24)	Yes (NF Elk, Catfish Lake)	Helicopter survey (4/7), follow-up survey (4/9, 4/10)	Yes (Catfish Lake)
Yager - Lawrence	4 surveys (2/24, 2/25)	Yes (Yager, near Allen Creek)	2 surveys (3/24)	No	Helicopter survey (4/7)	No
Van Duzen	4 surveys (2/24, 2/25, 2/28)	No	3 surveys (3/19, 3/20, 3/21)	No	Helicopter survey (4/8)	No
Lower Eel (Larabee Creek - North)	3 surveys (2/18, 2/19)	No	3 surveys (3/11, 3/12, 3/13)	Yes (subadults near Jordan Creek, Scotia)	Helicopter survey (4/8)	No
Larabee Creek	4 surveys (2/17, 2/18)	No	2 surveys (3/13, 3/17)	No	Helicopter survey (4/8)	No
Upper Eel (including High Rock Nest)	5 surveys (2/17, 2/18, 2/19, 2/20)	Yes (High Rock)	3 surveys (3/11, 3/12, 3/13)	Yes (near Dyerville)	Helicopter survey (4/8), (4/9, 4/11)	Yes (High Rock)
Bear River	4 surveys (2/18, 2/19, 2/20, 2/21)	No	4 surveys (3/14, 3/17, 3/18)	No	Helicopter survey (4/8)	No
Peaked Creek	1 survey (2/18)	No	1 survey (3/17)	No	1 survey (4/9)	No
North Fork Mattole	1 survey (2/24)	No	1 survey (3/24)	No	Helicopter survey (4/8)	No
East Branch North Fork Mattole	1 survey (2/20)	No	1 survey (3/24)	No	Helicopter survey (4/8)	No

osprey, and golden eagles (of which surveys can result in bald eagle observations) are discussed in the annual reports for each of these species.

During years in which property-wide surveys are conducted, if at any time within 0.5 mile of a THP unit 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, CDFW or USFWS are to be notified immediately and additional follow-up visits shall be conducted for each adult sighted to determine if eagles are nesting.

RESULTS

The 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 primarily ground-based surveys. In addition, helicopter survey techniques were used on the third survey to cover the majority of the survey area. The survey area was divided into 11 units by watershed. Ten biologists and biological technicians surveyed the 11 units a total of three times, conducting a total of 70 individual survey efforts, totaling approximately 277 observer-hours, and were 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 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 (Table 2). None of the bald eagle observations were within 0.5-mile of active THP operations.

HIGH ROCK NEST

Because the newly discovered nesting attempt near High Rock along the Eel River and Avenue of the Giants was within 0.5 mile of the Hibachi THP (1-12-104 HUM), the agencies were notified via email on 17 February when the first nesting observations were made. As per HCP 6.4.2.1 item # 6 and # 7, the notification stated that during the focused surveys we observed a pair of adult bald eagles copulating and carrying nest material. We conducted two follow up

Figure 1. High Rock Nest Tree and Bald Eagle Nest**Table 2. 2014 Bald Eagle Observations Summary**

Location	Date	Observation
High Rock Nest	2/17/2014	Adult pair, copulation, nest building or maintenance
	2/18/2014	Adult pair on nest
	2/19/2014	Adult pair on nest
	4/9/2014	Adult female on nest
Catfish Lake Nest	2/21/2014	Adult circling and perched near nest
	3/20/2014	Adult female, nest maintenance and on nest
	4/10/2014	Adult pair, on nest, prey delivery
	6/26/2014	Adults and fledgling (seen on osprey survey)
NF Elk River (near Boy Scout Camp)	2/26/2014	Adult, pair(?) perched, flight, no courtship or nest
	2/26/2014	Adult, pair perched, flight, no courtship or nest
	2/28/2014	Adult, pair(?) perched, tandem flight, no nest
	2/28/2014	Adult perched
	3/18/2014	Adult perched
Yager Creek near Allen Creek	2/24/2014	Adult perched, feeding
Eel River near Scotia	3/11/2014	Subadult foraging, circling, perched
Eel River near Dyerville	3/11/2014	Adult flying, circling, audio
Eel River near Jordan Creek	3/12/2014	Subadult foraging, circling

visits and determined that a pair of bald eagles were exhibiting nesting behavior and apparently using a nest structure located on Humboldt Redwoods State Park property (T1S-R2E, SW ¼

Section 14 HBM). State Park representatives were also notified at that time. The THP was not active during the breeding season, and no timber operations commenced within 0.5 mile of the nest location.

All observations at High Rock during the breeding season (Table 2) were indicative of nesting activity. Due to staffing and time constraints, we were unable to attempt follow-up visits to determine reproductive success until 8 and 9 July. This represents a relatively large gap in observation of the nest during the period when presence of young eagles could have been determined. An adult male was seen perched near the nest on 8 July, but no activity was observed at the nest and no juvenile eagles were observed. On 9 July no bald eagle activity was observed in the vicinity of the nest. Therefore, we are unable to provide any conclusive results for this nesting attempt at High Rock for 2014.

CATFISH LAKE NEST

Three visits were made to the Catfish Lake nest during our focused surveys of the Elk River watershed. All of the results were indicative of nesting (Table 2). We made a reproductive success visit on 26 June during an osprey survey, and observed a single fledgling at the nest, and flying to a perch, with the adult bald eagles.

NORTH FORK ELK RIVER

A third area of somewhat sustained bald eagle observation on our 2014 surveys was on the North Fork of Elk River near the Boy Scout Camp. There were five observations recorded along the same stretch of the river, of either a pair or a single adult bald eagle, between 26 February and 18 March (Table 2). Other than the pair observed flying together (i.e. tandem flight), there was no courtship or nesting behavior observed, and there were no further bald eagle observations on either the 7 April helicopter flight, or a follow-up ground survey on 9 April, conducted to specifically cover the area of the earlier detections. It has been relatively common to observe bald eagles along this reach of North Fork Elk River in the winter and early spring on past surveys. As a result, the timing of the observations, ending in mid-March, and the lack of nesting behavior leads us to conclude that this pair did not nest anywhere in the HRC survey area.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

During the 2014 property-wide survey there were four observations in the focused survey area apparently not related to those discussed above (Table 2). These observations, one on Yager Creek, near the Allen Creek Marbled Murrelet Conservation Area, and three along the Eel River (near Scotia, Dyerville, and Jordan Creek) were all between 24 February and 12 March. These are in areas, and during a time (late winter-early spring), when it has been typical to observe wintering bald eagles. Observations consisted of both adults and sub-adults, and no nesting behavior accompanied these observations.

During the 2014 bald eagle breeding season there were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs.

The Rio Dell nest that has been discussed in previous reports seems to have been abandoned (Hunt von-Arb, pers comm.). The nest originally used by the pair fell out of the tree in a storm during the winter of 2012-2013. It is possible, but unknown, if the pair that had nested near Rio Dell in previous years is the same pair that attempted to nest at High Rock in 2014.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the 2014 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, ten HRC biologists and biological technicians conducted a total of 70 individual survey efforts of the 11 survey units, totaling approximately 277 observer-hours, and completed over 25 days.

We think that the surveys were successful in detecting bald eagles, both those eagles that were simply foraging while wintering in the area, as well as those that have moved into the area to nest. Overall the total of 16 observations of individuals or pairs of bald eagles during the focused survey represented foraging eagles, the nesting eagles at Catfish Lake, and the newly discovered nest near High Rock. None of the bald eagle observations were within 0.5-mile of active THP

operations, although our observations did alert us to the new nest near operations that were planned for later in the 2014 season.

In our 2013 report we noted that 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. This certainly seemed to be the case with 2014 and the discovery of the High Rock nest. We will also continue to watch other ‘hot spots’ on the ownership, for example along the North Fork of Elk River, and ensure that HRC personnel are aware of an increased presence of bald eagles on HRC property near Humboldt Bay and along the Eel River, which could lead to additional future nesting attempts on or adjacent to HRC property.

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

REFERENCES

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.

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

APPENDIX I

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 II

2014 BALD EAGLE PROPERTY-WIDE SURVEY MAP