



**Humboldt  
Redwood™**

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**Bald Eagle Annual Report  
2017**

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**February 1, 2018**



Cover photo: Adult female bald eagle at High Rock nest (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, 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 (e.g. from 2015 - 2018).

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 2017 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 2017 bald eagle breeding season there were *no* observations of bald eagles during surveys for golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), osprey (*Pandion haliaeetus*) nest surveys, or nest monitoring surveys done at the High Rock bald eagle nest. There was an audio contact of a bald eagle near the Catfish Lake known nest. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs. The lone bald eagle observation was not within 0.5-mile of active 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.

**Project Manager/ Primary Author**



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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 2017 on HRC property within the bald eagle survey area. Property-wide focused surveys will next be conducted during 2019. Given that 2017 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 2017 report summarizes any bald eagle detections incidental to other species surveys, any follow-up surveys conducted in response to bald eagle detections gained while involved in other activities, and the results of the habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs.

During the 2017 bald eagle breeding season there were *no* observations of bald eagles during surveys for golden eagles, osprey nest surveys, or nest monitoring surveys done at the High Rock nest. There was an audio contact only near the Catfish Lake bald eagle nest. No bald eagles were observed on Peregrine falcon surveys. There were no bald eagle observations during a total of 18 habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs that were done in 2017. 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 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.

## 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 2017 bald eagle breeding season there were no observations of bald eagles as a result of golden eagle, osprey, or Peregrine falcon surveys. No bald eagles were observed at the High Rock nest. At the Catfish Lake bald eagle nest there was only an audio detection. 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.



### Catfish Lake nest monitoring:

One monitoring visit was made to a single observation point to check on the 2017 location and status of the Catfish Lake bald eagle nest. On 17 May a single audio detection was made that was estimated to be north of the nest. No other observations were obtained.

### Observations incidental to other activities or detections:

Bald eagles were observed on occasion in flight along the Eel River near Scotia but no nesting activity was observed.

## **DISCUSSION**

During the 2017 bald eagle breeding season there were no 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.

Continued activity of bald eagles along the Eel River relatively late in the breeding season during the 2014 – 2017 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.

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 2018. 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.

## **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.