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# Bald Eagle Annual Report

## 2023

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**February 1, 2024**



Cover photo: Adult bald eagle perched near Yager Creek (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:** Brad Mauney, Lead Biologist, Forest Sciences

### Executive Summary

Per the 2005 Minor Modification of the Bald Eagle Conservation Plan of the HCP, property-wide focused surveys for bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) have been conducted on a five-year cycle that began in 2009. Therefore, property-wide surveys were conducted in 2009 (HRC 2010), in 2014 (HRC 2015), and in 2019 (HRC 2020). No property-wide focused surveys are conducted in the intervening years and the next will be scheduled for 2024.

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 2023 was a year without focused surveys, we are once again providing a summary report of any other observed bald eagle activity and any associated follow-up survey information.

During the 2023 bald eagle breeding season there was one adult bald eagle observed near the Catfish Lake historic nest. No bald eagles were observed at either the historic High Rock nest or the Van Duzen nest (osprey (*Pandion haliaeetus*, nest 592). There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs.

There were bald eagle observations incidental to Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) and golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) surveys. There was a pair of adult bald eagles observed during Peregrine falcon surveys near the Shively Bluff area. Two other incidental single bald eagle detections occurred, one in the Yager creek drainage and one in the Bell creek drainage. Both either occurred outside of 0.5 mile of any active THP or occurred prior to 15<sup>th</sup> March. No nesting behavior was observed on either of these incidental observations.

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

As per the 2005 Minor Modification of the Bald Eagle Conservation Plan of the HCP (Appendix D), property-wide surveys were conducted in 2009, in 2014, and again in 2019. No systematic, focused bald eagle surveys were conducted in 2023 on HRC property within the bald eagle survey area. Property-wide focused surveys will next be conducted in 2024. Given that 2023 was a year without focused surveys, we are providing a summary report of any observed bald eagle activity and any associated follow-up survey information.

As a brief review of the last property-wide report, during the 2019 bald eagle breeding season property-wide focused surveys for bald eagles 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 recorded 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.

This report summarizes any 2023 bald eagle detections from nest monitoring, those that were incidental to other species surveys, 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.

## **METHODS**

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

- Focused surveys conducted at five-year intervals that began in 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 attached HCP language (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 2023 bald eagle breeding season there was a bald eagle observed near the Catfish Lake historic nest. It was noted that there appeared to be very little nest material visible on the historic nest platform and no nesting behavior was observed. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs.

There were bald eagle observations incidental to Peregrine falcon and golden eagle surveys. There was one adult bald eagle seen in Bear River while conducting a golden eagle survey and a pair of bald eagles observed while conducting a peregrine falcon survey located on the Eel River near the Shively Bluffs area. There were two incidental bald eagle observations, one of an adult bald eagle in the Lawrence Creek drainage, another incidental observation of a bald eagle sighted in Bell Creek.

### Observations during nest monitoring surveys:

We conducted monitoring surveys at known historic nest sites High Rock (12 April and 28 April), Catfish Lake (11th and 26 April) and the Van Duzen nest (20 February and 10 April). At the High Rock nest on the Eel River there were no bald eagles observed. There was one bald

eagle observed on the 26 April survey at Catfish Lake, but no nesting behavior was observed. At the Van Duzen nest (historic osprey nest # 592) there were no observations of any bald eagles on monitoring surveys. There were no operations within 0.5-mile of these historic nest sites.

#### Observations on other species surveys:

##### Peregrine Falcon Surveys

During a Peregrine falcon monitoring survey on 28 April and again 24 May 2023 at the Shively Bluff traditional nest location two adult bald eagles were observed flying above the Eel River for approximately five minutes on two separate occasions. Follow up visits were conducted, and bald eagles were observed on both visits. It is possible it's the pair from just upstream at the High Rock nest area. No nesting behavior was observed.

##### Golden Eagle Surveys

Golden eagle surveys were conducted for the Miller Time THP (# 1-21-00149 HUM) from 17 January to 18 May 2023 (total of fourteen surveys). Surveys were completed prior to the beginning of operations on the THP. During the survey on 1 February, an adult bald eagle was observed flying over Bear River. No nesting behavior was observed. No bald eagles were observed on any of the other surveys.

##### Osprey Surveys

There were no bald eagles observed on any Osprey surveys in 2023.

## **DISCUSSION**

During the 2023 nesting period there were several observations of bald eagles, as described above, although all of them were of the non-nesting variety. Bald eagles were observed incidental to Peregrine falcon, golden eagle, and incidental to other field work. No observations occurred within 0.5-mile of active THP operations.

Importantly, the 2023 results indicate that bald eagles may be detected regularly on other species surveys in years when property-wide surveys are not conducted.

## **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 again be conducted in 2024, including monitoring of known nest sites. No changes in monitoring strategies are recommended at this time.

## **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.

Humboldt Redwood Company, LLC. 2020. 2019 Humboldt Redwood Company Habitat Conservation Plan Bald Eagle Annual Report. 1 February 2020. 16 pp.



## **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 CDFW. 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 2,640 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 CDFW 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 CDFW 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, CDFW 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 CDFW 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 CDFW 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 CDFW, and USFWS or CDFW 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 CDFW, USFWS, and CAL FIRE and complete a site-specific consultation with CDFW 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 CDFW 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 CDFW 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.