



**Humboldt
Redwood™**

**Bald Eagle Annual Report
2020**

February 1, 2021



Cover photo: Adult bald eagle perched near Catfish Lake 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, Director, 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), in 2014 (HRC 2015), and in 2019 (HRC 2020). No property-wide focused surveys are conducted in the intervening years (i.e., from 2015 - 2018) and 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 2020 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 2020 bald eagle breeding season there was one bald eagle observation during surveys for golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*). There were no bald eagle observations during osprey (*Pandion haliaeetus*), or Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) nest surveys, or during a nest monitoring survey done at the Catfish Lake nest. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs. Two incidental bald eagle observations were obtained during spotted owl activity site monitoring activities. Follow-up surveys were conducted to a possible bald eagle detection in the North Fork Elk River watershed that resulted in no positive bald eagle observations.

No changes in monitoring strategies are recommended at this time. The next property-wide bald eagle survey is scheduled for the 2024 breeding season.

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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, in 2014, and again in 2019. No systematic, focused bald eagle surveys were conducted in 2020 on HRC property within the bald eagle survey area. Property-wide focused surveys will next be conducted in 2024. Given that 2020 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.

In review of last year's report, during the 2019 bald eagle breeding season 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 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 2020 bald eagle detections that were 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.

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 2020 bald eagle breeding season there was one bald eagle observation during surveys for golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*). There were no bald eagle observations during osprey (*Pandion haliaeetus*), or Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) nest surveys, or during a nest monitoring survey done at the Catfish Lake nest. There were no bald eagle observations during habitat evaluations and localized searches for THPs. Two incidental bald eagle observations were obtained during spotted owl activity site monitoring activities. Follow-up surveys were conducted to a possible bald eagle detection in the North Fork Elk River watershed that resulted in no positive bald eagle observations.

Catfish Lake nest monitoring:

The Catfish Lake historic bald eagle nest is not on HRC property, and thus is only monitored to determine nesting status when operations are scheduled within disturbance minimization buffers, which was not the case in 2020. However, one brief monitoring visit was made to a single observation point to check on the possible 2020 location and status of the Catfish Lake bald eagle nest. On 19 June a surveyor conducted a brief nest observation near the historic nest. No bald eagle observations were obtained.

Observations incidental to other activities or detections:

Bald eagle observations incidental to spotted owl activity site monitoring visits occurred on 10 and 15 April in the upper Bear River watershed, above Nelson Creek (left bank tributary of Bear River). The surveyor observed two adult bald eagles either perched or circling on 10 April. No nesting behavior was observed. Potential nest trees exist in the area, although no known current or historic nest trees are known. In response to this detection the surveyor returned to the location on 15 April for a two-hour follow-up survey. On this visit a single adult bald eagle was observed circling in the same general area, but again no nesting behavior was observed. There were no further observations of bald eagles in the area.

One bald eagle observation was obtained on 23 April during golden eagle surveys at a station being surveyed for THP 1-19-00029 HUM (“Rainbow Ranch”). The observation was of an eagle soaring at long distance and off-property. There were no further bald eagle observations at that location.

No bald eagles were observed on follow-up surveys conducted in response to a potential bald eagle observation near McWhinney Creek, a right bank tributary of the North Fork Elk River. On 13 May an HRC Forester observed an adult bald eagle between McWhinney and Doe Creeks. The bald eagle was not exhibiting any nesting behavior. The observation was over 0.5-mile from any active operations on THP 1-19-00114 HUM (“Winnie”). Nonetheless, we conducted three follow-up visits as follows:

1. 14 May: 1655-1855 hours, no detections.
2. 15 May: 1240-1510 hours, no detections.
3. 20 May: 0945-1200 hours, no detections.

DISCUSSION

Overall, there were very few bald eagle detections during 2020. Bald eagles were observed incidental to golden eagle surveys, spotted owl surveys, and during forestry work. Although detections occurred in April and May, there were no observations of nesting behavior. No observations occurred within 0.5-mile of active THP operations.

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 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.