

Appendix D

Bob Whitney's Report



Preliminary Biological Assessment Brooktrails Second Access St. Francis Ranch

By

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II. Biological Setting

This preliminary biological assessment has been conducted within a portion of Sections 1 & 2 T18N R14W MDB&M, approximately 2 miles northwest of the town of Willits, in the vicinity of the intersections of Sherwood Road, Brooktrails Drive and the proposed routes of Alternatives C, G & H. The assessment area is located in a gentle valley bisected by Upp Creek with elevations of approximately 1,600 feet. Upp Creek forms a corridor through a portion of the St. Francis Ranch by providing water, riparian and habitat connectivity through the ranch. Upp Creek flows through the ranch to Little Lake Valley and eventually to Outlet Creek and the Eel River.

The site is vegetated by three major plant communities: Lower Montane Coniferous Forest in mature second growth (Coast range mixed Nonserpentine, Digger coniferous forest - element code 84110), Cismontane Woodland (Oregon Oak Woodland – element code 71110 and Pine-Chaparral - element code 71322) and Valley and Foothill Grassland (Bald Hills Prairie – element code 41200) (Holland, 1986).

The Lower Montane Coniferous Forest is dominated by a mature over story of Douglas-Fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii* and Ponderosa Pine *Pinus ponderosa*. The hardwood component is predominately characterized by old-growth Black oak *Quercus kelloggii*, Tanoak *Lithocarpus densifloris*, and Madrone *Arbutus menziesii* in various age/size classes. The mid level vegetation is very sparse; it is comprised of Deerbrush *Ceanothus inetgerrimus*, Blue elderberry *Sambucus mexicana* and Oregon grape *Berberis nervosa*. Some of the more prominent herb layer species include, Western swordfern *Polystichum munitum*, Pussy ears *Calochortus tolmei* and Douglass Iris *Iris douglassii*.

The Cismontane Woodland habitat is dominated by Grey pine *Pinus sambiana*, Interior Live Oak *Quercus wislizenii* and Black Oak *Quercus kelloggii*. The shrub layer is dominated by; Chaparral whitethorn *Ceanothus leucodermis*, and Coyote brush *Baccharis pilularis*. Some of the more prominent herb layer species include; Miniature Lupine *Lupinus bicolor*, Pacific snakeroot *Sanicula crassicaulis*, and Canyon nemophila *Nemophila heterophylla*.

Some of the plants in the Bald Hills Prairie habitat include; Hedgehog dogtail grass *Cynosurus echinatus*, Hardin grass *Phalaris aquatica*, California Oat-grass *Danthonia californica*, Yellow monkey flower *Mimulus guttatus*, Baby blue eyes *Nemophila menziesii* and Douglass meadowfoam *Limnanthes douglassii*, and Baker's meadowfoam *Limnanthes bakeri*.

III. Methodology

A field survey was conducted on April 1, 2008 along the proposed common road alignment of Alternatives C, G & H and on both sides of Upp Creek from the pond on the north end of the watercourse to the fence line at the southeastern edge of the pasture. This area was walked, and all wildlife observed and all significant biological features were noted and mapped.

Prior to the field survey, various sources of information were reviewed, including aerial photos, maps, Timber Harvest Plans, a previous botanical survey report, the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) Database and the California Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) was queried for the Burbeck and Willits 7.5' U.S.G.S. Quadrangles. Please see the attached map, St. Francis Ranch Preliminary Biological Assessment Upp Creek, for some highlights of significant biological features and conditions in this survey area.

IV. Survey Results

The previous botanical survey report (Dean Schlichting 2002) identified the presence of a California Native Plant Society (CNPS) list 1B, federal species of special concern, Baker's Meadowfoam (*Limnathes bakeri*). Further botanical investigation is expected to be completed by June 1st and this report will be updated if necessary.

The following is a list of all plant species identified during the 2002 botanical survey:

Western chain fern *Woodwardia fimbriata*
Bracken fern *Pteridium aquilinum*
Western swordfern *Polystichum munitum*
Lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina*
Goldback fern *Pentagramma triangularis*
Common horsetail *Equisetum arvense*
Giant horsetail *Equisetum telmateia ssp braunii*
Douglas-Fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii*
Ponderosa pine *Pinus ponderosa*
Sugar pine *Pinus lambertiana*
Grey pine *Pinus sambiana*
Madrone *Arbutus menziesii*
California black oak *Quercus kelloggii*
Oregon white oak *Quercus garryana*
Coast live oak *Quercus agrifolia*
Canyon live oak *Quercus chrysolepis*,
Interior scrub oak *Quercus berberidifolia*
California bay *Umbellularia californica*
Buckeye *Aesculus californica*
Poison oak *Toxicodendron diversilobum*
Coyote brush *Baccharis pilularis*
California hazel *Corylus cornuta var. californica*

Oregon grape *Berberis nervosa*
Creeping holly grape *Berberis repens*
Hairy honeysuckle *Lonicera hispidula*
Creeping snowberry *Symphocarpus mollis*
Blue elderberry *Sambucus mexicana*
Manzanita *Arctostaphylos manzanita ssp. manzanita*
Manzanita *Arctostaphylos canescens spp. canescens*
Yerba santa *Eriodictyon californicum*
Whipple vine *Whippelia modesta*
Chaparral whitethorn *Ceanothus leucodermis*
Deerbrush *Ceanothus integerrimus*
California Coffee berry *Rhamnus californica*
California blackberry *Rubus ursinus*
Blackcap *Rubus leucodermis*
Oceanspray *Holodiscus discolor*
Woodrose *Rosea gymnocarpa*
Mountain mahogany *Cercocarpus betuloides*
Sweet cicely *Osmorhiza chilensis*
Pacific snakeroot *Sanicula crassicaulis*
Big seeded lomatium *Lomatium macrocarpum*
Foothill lomatium *Lomatium utriculatum*
Shepard's needle *Scandix pectan-vineris*
Filaree *Erodium brachycarpum*
White-flowered hawkweed *Hieracium albiflorum*
Bull thistle *Cirsium vulgare*
Pathfinder *Adenocaulon bicolor*
California goldfieds *Lasthenia californica*
Mules ears *Wyethia mollis*
Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*
Hound's tongue *Cyanoglossum grande*
Popcorn flower *Plagiobothrys nothofulvus*
Fiddle neck *Amsinckia menziesii var. intermedia*
Toothwort *Cardamine californica*
Wild pea *Lathyrus lestitus*
Hillside lotus *Lotus humistratus*
Miniature lotus *lotus micranthus*
Spring Vetch *Vicia sativa*
American vetch *Vicia americana*
Miniature lupine *Lupinus bicolor*
Sky lupine *Lupinus nanus*
Hop clover *Trifolium aureum*
Balloon clover *Trifolium depauperatum*
Doves foot *Geranium molle*
Cut leaved Geranium *Geranium dissectum*
Baby white eyes *Nemophila menziesii spp. atomaria*
Canyon nemophila *Nemophila heterophylla*
Douglass Iris *Iris douglassii*
Blue-eyed grass *Sisyrinchium bellum*
Yerba beuna *Satureja douglassii*
California hedge nettle *Stachys ajugoides*
Field mint *Mentha arvensis*

Coast flatstem onion *Allium falcifolium*
Blue dicks *Dichelostemma pulchellum*
Fawn lily *Erythronium californicum*
Soap plant *Chlorogalum pomeridianum*
Pussy ears *Calochortus tolmiei*
Douglas meadowfoam *Limnanthes douglasii*
Baker's meadowfoam *Limnanthes bakeri*
Calypso orchid *Calypso bulbosa*
California poppy *Eschscholzia californica*
Henderson's shooting star *Dodecathron hendersonii*
Baby stars *Linanthus parviflorus*
Variableleaf Collomia *Collomia heterophylla*
Wood strawberry *Fragaria vesca*
Goosegrass *Galium aparine*
California buttercup *Ranunculus occidentalis*
Prickle seed buttercup *Ranunculus muricatus*
Indian warrior *Pedicularis densifloris*
Yellow monkeyflower *Mimulus guttatus*
Long spurred plectritus *Plectritus ciliosa*
Oak mistletoe *Phoradendron villosum*
Pine violet *Viola lobata*
Nut-grass *Cyperus eragrostis* var. *eragrostis*
Sedge *Juncus effusus*
Sedge *Juncus patens*
Hedgehog dogtail *Cynosurus echinatus*
Hardin grass *Phalaris aquatica*
California Oat-grass *Danthonia californica*
Slender wild Oats *Avena barbata*
Western fescue *Festuca occidentalis*
Medusa head *Taeniatherum caput-medusae*

The following is a list of all wildlife species identified during the 2008 survey:

American coot (*Fulica Americana*)
American robin (*Turdus migratoris*)
California quail (*Callipepla californica*)
California towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*)
common raven (*Corvus corax*)
dark-eyed junco (*Junco hyemalis*)
mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
marsh wren (*Cistothorus palustris*)
northern flicker (*Colaptes auratus*)
oak titmouse (*Baeolophus inornatus*)
pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*)
red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)
spotted toehee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*)
Stellar's jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)
turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*)
western bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*)

western scrub jay (*Aphelocoma californica*)
white-crowned sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)

black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*)
black-tailed jack rabbit (*Lepus californicus*)

western fence lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*)
rough-skinned newt (*Taricha granulose*)

In addition to the plant and wildlife species identified during the surveys the following key wildlife habitat elements were also observed:

- The proposed common road alignment of Alternatives C, G & H cross over or near an approximate 20' high compacted soil fill dam on Upp Creek. The dam has created an approximate two-acre pond with water obligate plants and riparian vegetation providing permanent habitat for fish and other aquatic species as well as water for all wildlife species. Please see attached Photo #1.
- Mature riparian habitat is located on both sides of Upp Creek below the pond directly in the path of any road alignment from the intersection of Brooktrails Drive and Sherwood Road of Alternative C, G or H.
- Potential wetland habitat was observed in the meadow areas and below the dam on Upp Creek.
- Conifer and hardwood snags with nesting cavities were observed throughout the area.
- A potential den site/basal hollow was observed in the base of a black oak tree.
- Scattered old growth oak and fir trees were identified with large “wolfy” limbs, bole defects, mistletoe, cavities and snag tops.
- While not observed, the DFG NSO Database revealed the presence of two Northern Spotted Owl territories in the vicinity. Territory MEN224 is within 500' of the route proposed by Alternative G.

V. Potential Impacts and Recommended Mitigation

A permanent county road through the assessment area could potentially have significant adverse impacts on the biological resources in the area. Specifically, a portion of the state and federally listed Baker's meadowfoam population which occupies the site could be extirpated during the road construction phase. The construction and use of a permanent county road within 500' of a Northern Spotted Owl territory could have significant adverse impacts. A wildlife movement corridor that exists between Outlet Creek and Upp Creek bounded on one side by Highway 101 and on the other side by the Brooktrails subdivision would be bisected by the road inhibiting wildlife movement through the corridor. The special wildlife habitat elements located on site including the wetland and riparian habitats, old growth trees and snags could also adversely impact wildlife that depend on these specialized habitat elements.

It is recommended that prior to giving serious consideration to Alternatives C, G & H that a complete biological assessment be conducted to fully identify potential impacts that might arise from these alternatives.

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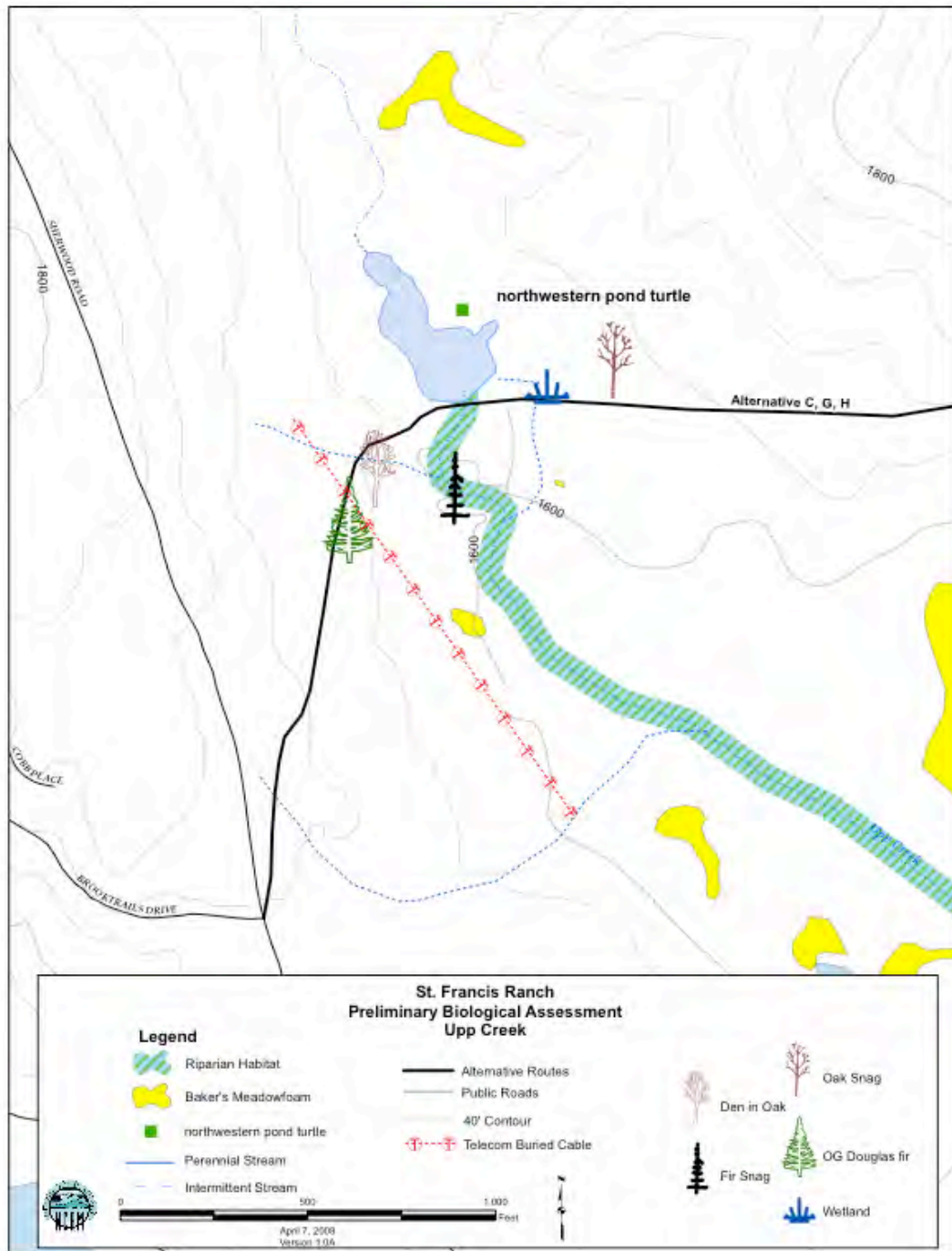
B.S. Wildlife Management, Humboldt State University 1991.

Over 15 years field experience working for the US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and private firms conducting wildlife surveys for various wildlife species including, but not limited to: Northern Spotted Owl, Northern Goshawk, Marbled Murrelet, Swainson's Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Fisher, Southern Torrent Salamander and Red Tree Vole.

VII. References

- California Natural Diversity Data Base. 2008. (Queried for the Burbeck and Willits 7.5' Quads). State of California, The Resources Agency, Department of Fish and Game, Natural Heritage Division, Sacramento, California.
- California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System, Data Base Version 8.0. 2005. California Department of Fish and Game and Interagency Wildlife Task Group, Sacramento, California.
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- Schlichting, Dean. 2002. Special Species Status Report, Botanical Survey, St. Francis. North Coast Resource Management. Unpublished report.
- Small, Arnold. 1994. California Birds: Their status and distribution. Ibis Publishing Company, Vista, California. 342pp.
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- Zeiner, D.C., W.F. Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1990. California's Wildlife, Vol. III, Mammals. State of California, The Resources Agency, Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. 407 pp.

VIII. St. Francis Ranch, Preliminary Biological Assessment, Upp Creek Map



IX. St. Francis Ranch Photos April 1, 2008

Photo #1



Photo #1 shows the lower portion of the pond and dam on Upp Creek at the proposed road crossing.

Photo #2



Photo #2 shows the wetland below the pond in the vicinity of the proposed road crossing.

Photo #3



Photo #3 shows Upp Creek in the vicinity of the proposed road crossing.

Photo #4



Photo #4 shows the wet meadow on the east side of Upp Creek in the vicinity of the proposed road crossing.

Photo #5



Photo #5 shows the den site/basal hollow in the base of a black oak tree.

Photo #6



Photo #6 shows a large conifer (Douglas fir) snag in center of photo.

Photo #7



Photo #7 shows typical Lower Montane Coniferous Forest Habitat in area.

Photo #8



Photo #8 is a wildlife oak tree in a wet meadow within the proposed road alignment.

Photo #9



Photo #9 is a Pileated Woodpecker on a Douglas fir tree adjacent to Upp Creek near the proposed road.