



United States Department of the Interior

Redwood National Park
1111 Second Street
Crescent City, California 95531

N1621 (Elam Creek Loop Bridge)

March 4, 2014

Mr. Bruce Bingham, Field Supervisor
Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office
1655 Heindon Road
Arcata, CA 95521

Subject: Request for Informal Consultation on Elam Creek Loop Bridge Demolition/Trail Reroute

Dear Bruce,

The Elam Creek Loop Bridge project was discussed by members of your staff and mine regarding its potential to impact the northern spotted owl, during a phone conversation on January 9, 2014, and at an Interagency Consultation Team meeting at South Operations Center in Orick, on February 11, 2014.

Project Description

Sometime in December 2013, one or more large old-growth redwood snags fell over near the Elam Creek Loop Horse Trail, taking out a number of mature alder trees on the way down. The alders fell on an 80-foot long fiber-reinforced plastic bridge spanning an unnamed tributary to Redwood Creek, severely damaging it. The redwoods and alders fell partially in the trail and created a massive amount of large woody debris, covering an estimated 0.25 acre. Park Roads and Trails staff has decided not to replace the bridge, which is irreparable. Instead it will be dismantled and removed from the site. In place of the bridge, the trail will be rerouted across the stream upslope from the bridge on a portion of an abandoned logging road. The project site is in old-growth redwood forest, approximately 0.5 mi upslope of Redwood Creek on the west side.

Prior to bridge demolition and trail work (planned for August and September of this year, and to be included in a separate biological assessment/consultation), the large woody debris must be cleared from the existing trail and area around the bridge. In order to reduce the amount of time associated with high noise levels generated by mechanical equipment during the marbled murrelet breeding season, we are proposing to clear the debris prior to March 24 of this year. The wood will be bucked and cut into sections to be used as cribbing to stabilize the outside edge of the rerouted trail segment. This work will involve up to 6 days of chainsaw use with 2 or 3 gas-powered saws, for approximately 5 hours each day (between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.) between March 10 and March 23.

Existing Environment and Status of Northern Spotted Owl

The project site is in an area of slope instability that has created an opening in the forest above the trail where trees have toppled and alders have grown in. There are 18 acres of old growth redwood forest within 500 feet of the project site. The site is somewhat topographically isolated by ridges to the east and west and above to the south.

Spotted owl surveys were conducted at and around this location in 2002-2004, and at Elam Creek Horse Camp, 0.5 mi to the north, in 2005 and 2009. No spotted owls were detected during these surveys, however, barred owls were detected in a number of years with surveys. The last time spotted owls were detected in the Elam Creek territory, over 0.5 mi away from the project site, was in 1994.

Impacts of the Proposed Project and Determination of Effects

This project has the potential to impact any spotted owls that may be residing near the project area due to increased noise disturbance early in the breeding season. Spotted owls are known to reduce their vocalizations in proximity to barred owls. It is possible that spotted owls have gone undetected by surveyors over the years, or have moved in to the area since it was last surveyed in 2009. However, given the survey history of this site, and the long period of time with not a single spotted owl response, it is probable that spotted owls do not occur here.

The project proposes to run chainsaws for 5 hours a day for up to 6 days between March 10 and March 24, relatively early in the spotted owl breeding season.

Due to the survey history of this site, the limited area of the project site bounded by ridges on three sides, and timing of the project, it is our determination that this project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the northern spotted owl.

I am requesting concurrence on this proposed action. If you need further information please contact Wildlife Biologist, Kristin Schmidt at (707) 465-7741.

Sincerely,

Stephen Prokop
National Park Superintendent



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office

1655 Heindon Road

Arcata, California, 95521

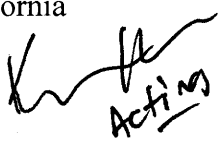
Phone: (707) 822-7201 FAX: (707) 822-8411

In Reply, refer to:
AFWO-14B0031-1410043

MAR 19 2014

Memorandum

To: Park Superintendent, Redwood National Park
Crescent City, California

From: Field Supervisor 
Arcata, California

Subject: Informal Consultation on Vegetation Clearing at Elam Creek Loop Bridge in
Redwood National Park, Humboldt County, California

This memorandum responds to your March 4, 2014, memorandum requesting the Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) concurrence with your determination of effects for vegetation clearing in association with a proposed (and future) bridge replacement project at the Elam Creek Loop Horse Trail (Trail), Redwood National Park (Park), Humboldt County, California. You determined the action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the federally listed as threatened northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*). This response is prepared in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) (Act) and its implementing regulations (50 CFR §402).

This consultation is based on information provided in your March 4, 2014, memorandum and other sources of information. The memorandum contains a complete description of the proposed action and its effects on the northern spotted owl and is hereby incorporated by reference. Documents related to this consultation are on file in this office.

In December 2013, one or more large old-growth redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) snags fell near the Trail, causing mature Alder (*Alnus* sp.) trees to fall; the alders fell on an 80-foot long fiber-reinforced plastic bridge spanning an unnamed tributary to Redwood Creek, severely damaging the bridge. The redwoods and alders also fell across the Trail, creating a large amount of woody debris that have blocked the Trail, covering an estimated 0.25 acre. Parks Roads and Trails staff have decided not to replace the bridge, which is irreparable; instead, the bridge will be dismantled and removed from the site, and the Trail will be re-routed across the stream upslope from the current location of the bridge on a portion of an abandoned logged road. The project site is in old-growth redwood forest, and a formal consultation (not yet initiated) on dismantling and removing the

bridge (proposed during summer 2014) would cover possible effects to marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*).

Prior to bridge dismantling and trail work (planned for August and September 2014), the large woody debris must be cleared from the existing trail and the area around the bridge. In order to reduce the amount of time associated with elevated noise levels generated by mechanical equipment during the marbled murrelet breeding season (March 24 – September 15), the Park is proposing to clear the woody debris prior to March 24, 2014 (the start of the murrelet breeding season). The wood would be bucked and cut into sections to be used as cribbing to stabilize the outside edge of the proposed re-routed trail segment. This work would involve the use of as many as 3 gas-powered chainsaws over a period of 6 days, for approximately 5 hours each day, between March 10 and March 23.

The project site occurs within the range of the northern spotted owl, and within suitable northern spotted owl nesting/roosting habitat. Surveys for northern spotted owls were conducted at and near this location in 2002-04, and at Elam Creek Horse Camp, 0.5 mile to the north, in 2005 and 2009. Northern spotted owls were not detected during these surveys; however, barred owls have been (*Strix varia*) detected at and near the proposed project site. The last known nearest detection of northern spotted owls was in 1994, at the “Elam Creek Territory,” over 0.5 mile from the proposed project site.

Concurrence

The Service concurs with your determination that the project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the northern spotted owl, based on the following factors:

Disturbance

Project generated noise above ambient levels will occur within 500 feet of suitable northern spotted owl nesting habitat during the breeding season of the species (February 1 – July 31). However, based on the presence of barred owls in the vicinity of the proposed project site, it is likely that the behavior of northern spotted owls, if any northern spotted owls occur nearby, are being suppressed by barred owls and that northern spotted owls are not nesting within 500 feet of the project site. In addition, the clearing activities would generate noise for only a short time period (as much as 5 hours per day for as many as 6 days), relatively early in the northern spotted owl breeding season. As a result, we do not expect the proposed clearing of large woody debris to result in abandonment of any northern spotted owl breeding effort, or disruption of nesting activities.

Habitat Removal and Degradation

No suitable nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat will be removed or degraded by any of the proposed actions.

Injury or Harm

Injury or harm to northern spotted owls is not anticipated, because no live trees will be cut in suitable nesting and roosting habitat.

This consultation is valid until March 24, 2014. This concludes informal consultation on the Park's proposed clearing of woody debris in association with the future proposed dismantling and removal of the Elam Creek Loop Bridge. The Service will address effects of the bridge removal portion of this project in a separate formal consultation in the next few months. No further action pursuant to the Act is necessary, unless new information reveals that the proposed woody action (i.e., clearing woody debris): (1) may affect listed species in a manner, or to an extent, not considered in your correspondence; (2) the actions are modified in a manner that causes an effect on the listed species or critical habitat not considered in your correspondence; or (3) a new species is listed or critical habitat is designated that may be affected by the proposed actions.

If you have any questions or concerns about this consultation or the consultation process in general, please feel free to contact Bill McIver of my staff at (707) 822-7201.

cc:

Redwood National and State Parks, Orick, CA (Attn: Kristin Schmidt)
California Department of Parks and Recreation, Eureka (Attn: Amber Transou)
California Department of Fish and Game, Eureka (Attn: Mike Van Hattem)

