

N1621

Feb 1, 2000

Bruce Halstead, Project Leader
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1655 Heindon Rd.
Arcata, CA 95521

Dear Bruce:

This letter will report the amount of incidental take that may have occurred in occupied marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl nesting habitat from operations implemented within Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP) in 1999. Park staff has provided their accomplishments for last year and we calculated incidental take to have affected 1,623 acres of marbled murrelet nesting habitat and 532 acres of northern spotted owl nesting habitat (Table 1). We did not implement all of the actions described in the biological assessments for which we consulted. For example, no work was done last year on the Howland Hill Rd. grading and reprofiling of drainage ditches, and no public use occurred on the Skunk Cabbage Memorial Grove trail system in 1999.

Howland Hill Rd.

Annual grading and reprofiling

In spring of 1999, the road was in good repair from work done in fall 1998; so spring grading normally necessary after winter storms was deferred. No reprofiling was performed in fall 1999, because of unanticipated workload increases. The maintenance crew intends to resume operations in spring of 2000.

Annual Maintenance

Down tree removal-trails

On the Tall Trees trail, a maple tree was removed from the loop trail in the Tall Trees Grove. The work occurred in July, and chainsaw operation lasted 1.5 hours. No known spotted owl territories are located within ¼ mile of this area. For the entire trail, the acres of suitable marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl habitat occurring within ¼ mile of the trail corridor is 250 acres (both species). The tree removal undoubtedly affected only a portion of this, since the area abuts Redwood Creek and its wide gravel bars.

However, we reported the entire acreage figures in Table 1.

Trail brushing

On the lower 1.5 miles of the Redwood Creek trail, weed eaters were used to brush the encroaching vegetation. The work was scheduled to occur for 7 hours in June, but owing to the large amount of regrowth, it occurred April-June (once each month for 7 hours total operation each time). A total of 275 acres of suitable marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl habitat were affected.

Road grading and cleaning of in-board ditches

The only portion of the A-9 road complex graded this year was the A-9-7 Road. The work was scheduled to occur April-July, but took place in March of 1999. We calculated that grading this portion of the road complex affected 55 acres of suitable marbled murrelet nesting habitat and 132 acres of suitable northern spotted owl nesting habitat. The closest known owl activity center is MacArthur Creek 2, but owls did not occupy it in 1999.

Culvert replacement

Three culverts were replaced on the Off-Highway Road (Arco Road) parallel to Highway 101. The culverts replaced were not within .25 miles of suitable owl or murrelet habitat. A 150-foot section of the entrance road was within .25 miles of potential owl and murrelet habitat; however the equipment traveled through once at the beginning of the project and once at the end. Since this site is adjacent to Highway 101 with its high ambient noise levels, this mobilization was not considered to have affected potential habitat through noise disturbance above ambient levels. A culvert was replaced on the Upper M-Line in July of 1999. This activity required two weeks of work with heavy equipment, but was performed in the latter part of July, outside the northern spotted owl-breeding season. The activity affected 6 acres of potential marbled murrelet nesting habitat through noise disturbance.

Facility maintenance (mowing)¹

Grass was mowed at the Big Tree Wayside, Jedediah Smith, Prairie Creek, and Mill Creek Campgrounds, from June-Sep in 1999. Work had been scheduled April-June. We calculated the total incidental take from these activities as equal to the total incidental take allowed in the biological opinion. No northern spotted owls were found during compliance call-point surveys at these sites. One barred owl was detected at the Jedediah Smith Campground area in March of 1999.

Structure maintenance w/power tools¹

The Big Tree Wayside, Jedediah Smith, Prairie Creek, and Mill Creek Campgrounds were readied for the visitor season and maintained during the season by repairing restrooms, campsite tables, and clearing roads of fallen tree debris from Feb 1 to Sep 15. This work was programmed to occur yearlong (as necessary) in our Annual Maintenance biological assessment. As above, we determined total incidental take was equal to that stated in the biological opinion. The footbridge from Jed Smith Campground to Stout Grove picnic area was also installed immediately after Memorial Day.

¹These projects were not reported in the 1998 incidental take report; the acres of incidental take in 1998 was the same for that incurred in 1999. RNSP will assume the same amount of incidental take each year for these projects.

Hazard tree removal from State Park Campgrounds

Mill Creek Campground and the Jedediah Smith Campground/Hiouchi Visitor Center site had hazard trees removed with chainsaws from Mar 5 to Mar 15 of 1999. This timeframe was outside the marbled murrelet-nesting season, and no spotted owls were located during surveys so no incidental take was recorded for these actions.

Some of the timeframes that maintenance work occurred were outside of the dates proposed in the Annual Maintenance biological assessment. **If necessary**, RNSP will amend the biological assessment by re-initiating consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service if maintenance activities will require a larger time frame to accomplish in the future.

B-Mill Deck operations

The park determined that the incidental take required for this activity was 59 acres for marbled murrelet and 0 acres for the northern spotted owl. The work began after the northern spotted owl nesting season but covered the last three weeks of nesting season for the marbled murrelet. See the attached B-Mill Deck Project Restoration/Development report for further details on noise monitoring activities undertaken while the project was underway.

Watershed restoration activities

Road removal

The seven road removal projects conducted in 1999 were all begun after July 9; therefore, no incidental take was necessary for the northern spotted owl as a result of these activities. It was estimated in the biological assessment and stated in the biological opinion for watershed restoration that the yearly incidental take (through noise disturbance) for marbled murrelets would affect an average of 57 acres/year of potential nesting habitat. However, some of the roads covered under the seven year timeframe of the watershed restoration BA (30 miles of roads) have segments with no potential murrelet habitat within 0.25 miles, while other segments do. Thus, it is possible to complete a road segment one season during the road removal timeframes without incurring any take. Remaining years needed to complete the final road removal may have portions of the road within 0.25 miles of potential habitat, resulting in some years with acres of incidental take calculated, and other years (on the same road) with none.

This year we determined that road removal activities affected 145 acres of marbled murrelet potential nesting habitat through noise disturbance. A breakdown of roads follows:

- A-9-7-1 North was completed in 1999 with 66 acres estimated total murrelet incidental take incurred (this segment overlapped with the adjacent L-2-2-1 Rd, so total acres of incidental take was reported only once in Table 1 for the A-9-7-1 segment). No incidental take occurred for this road in 1998 since operations commenced after Sep 15.
- L-2-2-1 roadwork was combined with A-9-7-1 North (see above). No incidental take occurred in 1998 on this road since operations commenced after Sep 15.
- C-Line North road had no incidental take in '98 or '99 because limited operating periods were instituted.
- C-Line South road was completed in 1999 and had no incidental take in '98 or '99 because limited operating periods were instituted.

- Redwood Creek trail, M-10 and spurs were completed in 1999 and incurred 41 acres of incidental take in 1999; in 1998 the total incidental take incurred was 24 acres. Total incidental take for the last two years was 65 acres. This exceeded the incidental take estimated in the Watershed Restoration BA (estimated at 61 acres) by four acres; however, three acres of the incidental take that was incurred in 1998 was the result of clearing a downed tree from the Tall Trees Grove.
- The lower M-Line, M-8 and associated spurs were completed in 1999. Total incidental take was 38 acres in 1999, and 107 acres in 1998; the total acres of incidental take resulted in noise disturbance to 145 acres of potential marbled murrelet nesting habitat. This was 42 acres less than that estimated in the Watershed Restoration BA.
- The A120/A100 road system resulted in zero acres of incidental take of potential marbled murrelet nesting habitat. The affected area within 0.25 miles of the project area was surveyed for marbled murrelet presence/occupied behavior and no detections were recorded.

Skunk Cabbage Memorial Grove trail use

The biological opinion for public use of this trail allowed 59 acres of incidental take through noise disturbance to marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl potential nest habitat. All the trail work was done with hand tools during the breeding season, and no public use occurred on the trail in 1999, so no incidental take was necessary.

Summary

In 1999, RNSP operations required a total incidental take acreage of 1,623 for marbled murrelet and 532 for the northern spotted owl. This was considerably less than the total acreage identified in the incidental take statements contained within the five biological opinions issued to RNSP by USFWS. The total incidental take permitted yearly under these opinions is 5,336 acres for marbled murrelet (including the rough estimate of 59 acres per year under the watershed restoration program), and 3,072 acres for the northern spotted owl (plus an additional amount of estimated disturbance to presently unknown spotted owl territories through the watershed restoration program, which has been negated through implementation of limited operating procedures during the owl's breeding season).

Conservation recommendations

Each biological opinion issued by the Service to RNSP requested notice of any conservation recommendations implemented. Surveys for additional species were performed to determine their breeding/nesting locations so as not to affect these species through park operations. Surveys were performed for bald eagle, northern spotted owl, snowy plover, and peregrine falcon. Summary reports are included for the above species (peregrine falcon is included, since it was still federally listed for a portion of 1999).

This correspondence should clarify the implementation dates of operations that contributed to noise disturbance of marbled murrelets and northern spotted owls during their respective breeding seasons. If you should require further clarification of the information presented in this report, please contact Bill Falvey at (707) 464-6101 ext. 5241.

Sincerely,

Terrence D. Hofstra
Chief, Resource Management and Science
Redwood National and State Parks

CC: Chief of Maintenance Division (w/o enclosures)
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Roads and Trails Foreman (w/o enclosures)
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