

## **Guidelines for Biological Surveys and Biological Survey Reports for Proposed Development Projects (John Dixon & Jonna Engel, May 2012)**

Where land supports native vegetation or there is reason to believe that sensitive plant or animal species are present, a biological survey should be submitted with the application for a Coastal Development Permit. If not, this survey should be obtained before the application is deemed complete. At a minimum, a biological survey report should include the following elements. Site-specific conditions may require additional effort, such as protocol level surveys for listed species.

### **1. Introduction**

The introduction should describe the proposed project, include maps that provide both a regional context and local detail, and provide photographic documentation of the existing condition of the proposed development site. The introduction must also contain a discussion of the physical characteristics of the site, including, topography, soil types, microclimate, and migration corridors.

### **2. List of Potential Sensitive Species/Habitats**

A list of sensitive species and habitats that could potentially occur within the proposed development area should be included as an appendix to the report. This list can be generated from the California Natural Diversity Database, California Native Plant Society, and other reliable source(s). Sensitive species include rare, threatened, or endangered species that are designated or are candidates for listing under State or Federal Law, California Native Plant Society “1B” or “2” listed species, those species identified as state “fully protected species” or “species of special concern”, and any other species for which there is compelling evidence of rarity. The project biologist must then examine the site and determine whether the various species are present at the time of the survey or whether they are likely to be present at other times based on a habitat analysis and professional opinion. Those species that are present or likely to be present should be discussed in the body of the survey report. Constraints on the accuracy of the report (e.g., wrong season or time-of-day) should be explicitly discussed.

### **3. Results of Field Surveys**

- a) Biological surveys must consist of field survey methods appropriate to the species or habitat being surveyed. Protocol-level surveys (consult Department of Fish and Game (DFG) Survey and Monitoring Protocols and Guidelines, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), etc.) are required for those sensitive species likely to occur on the proposed development site.
- b) The report must contain a discussion of all field methods actually employed, including the methods for formal protocol surveys. The detailed survey protocols for particular sensitive species may be placed in an appendix, but simply referencing another document is not acceptable.

- c) Where trees suitable for nesting or roosting or significant foraging habitat are present, the biological survey should search for evidence of raptor use. If there is independent evidence of significant raptor use on or near the property a formal raptor protocol survey must be conducted.
- d) The biological survey must identify and map within polygons all the vegetation community types present on the property and generally indicate the location of vegetation communities on adjacent properties. The location of observed sensitive plant or animal species should also be shown on the map.
- e) The biological survey must include a description of the general biological context of the project site and a description of the actual wildlife use at the time of the survey and an estimate of probable additional wildlife use. This description will result from the biologist's visual and auditory search for birds and mammals or their sign and a search of leaf litter and under rocks for amphibians or reptiles.
- f) Potential wetland areas, as defined by the Coastal Act and the Commission's Regulations, must be identified and mapped as part of the biological survey. These areas must then be subjected to a formal, technical wetland delineation following the methods in the 1987 Army Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual and the Appropriate Regional Supplement.

#### **4. Discussion**

- a) The report must contain a map that shows the biological features of the site with an overlay of the proposed project. The biologist must identify and analyze the potential biological impacts of the proposed development and distinguish between permanent and temporary impacts. The duration of temporary impacts must be estimated and whether such impacts result in ground disturbance or the death of vegetation must be specified. Possible cumulative biological impacts must also be discussed.
- b) The report must identify any apparent unauthorized development, including grading or vegetation removal, that may have contributed to degradation or elimination of habitat area or species that would otherwise be present on the proposed development site were it in a healthy condition.
- c) Where applicable, the report should include an analysis of the frequency of wildfires affecting proposed development site and length of time since the last burn.
- d) Finally, the report must discuss the steps that will be taken to avoid and minimize impacts to sensitive resources, and present a plan to mitigate permissible unavoidable impacts.