

Mendocino County Guidelines for Biological Scoping Surveys

December 12, 2007 (Revised March 25, 2008)

The intent of the Biological Scoping Survey is to establish the potential for Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHAs) based on present conditions proximal to and within a proposed development area. A Biological Scoping Survey may assist an applicant in determining whether further biological surveys are needed, and may help determine the scope of further surveys. The following guidelines are intended to assist those who prepare and review environmental documents to determine when a Biological Scoping Survey is appropriate, who is qualified to conduct a Biological Scoping Survey, what a Biological Scoping Survey must include, and how the Biological Scoping Survey report works in conjunction with subsequent survey reports.

When should a scoping survey be conducted?

Scoping surveys should be conducted for any project requiring discretionary action by the County, such as but not limited to a Coastal Development Permit, land subdivision or Use Permit, where the project has the potential to impact undeveloped natural areas within the proximity of the project area. The proximity of the project area is generally defined as those areas encompassing all components of the proposed project, including all areas at least 100 feet from the outer edge of the proposed project. Depending on site conditions, this project area boundary may be expanded. For example, if the project area slopes toward a stream or other water body, or has the potential to impact special-status nesting birds or federally protected animal species, the biologist may need to survey those areas beyond 100 feet. Scoping surveys should be conducted early in project timeline, such as in the conceptual phase of the proposed development, and results should be submitted with the project application. The survey should generally occur within about 2 years of the project application. Newer surveys may be appropriate if site conditions or species status have changed in the interim.

Who is qualified to conduct a scoping survey?

A scoping survey must be conducted by a consultant who meets the minimum requirements outlined in DFG's "Guidelines for Assessing the Effects of Proposed Projects on Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Plants and Natural Communities." The consultant additionally needs to have enough biological background to establish the potential presence of environmentally sensitive wildlife species of concern. The County reserves the right to reject biological scoping surveys that do not appear to encompass all potentially present ESHAs.

What must a Biological Scoping Survey include?

At a minimum, the scoping survey must include the following:

- ❖ The name and contact information for the biological consultant, date the survey was conducted, and parcel number/s of the proposed development area.

- ❖ A list of potentially present plant species of concern (based on a nine quad California Native Plant Society (CNPS) and California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) search) including current Federal/State endangerment, Global/State ranking, and CNPS ranking where applicable.
- ❖ A brief description of the proposed development.
- ❖ A description of plant communities present, and their current Federal/State endangerment, Global/State ranking, and CNPS ranking.
- ❖ A description of wetland, riparian, stream, and other water body potential or presence, and the potential for presence of associated wildlife species including nesting birds. For stream habitats, stream class and potential impacts to fish or amphibians within or downstream of the project site shall be identified.
- ❖ Adequate scoping for potentially present environmentally sensitive wildlife species including those listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Fish and Game, and wildlife species protected by the Bird Treaty Act.
- ❖ Maps to scale showing the proposed development area and potential impact area. Maps need to show plant communities present and existing development, must have a north arrow depicting direction, and need to show parcel boundaries. The plant communities present should be described, including current Federal/State endangerment, Global/State ranking, and CNPS ranking where applicable, and quality/quantity of habitat.
- ❖ A summary of recommended follow-up surveys, including specific biological, botanical and certified wetland delineation surveys.

How does the Biological Scoping Survey report works relative to subsequent survey reports?

The Biological Scoping Survey report represents the first step in the survey process, which identifies the potential ESHAs and recommends specific follow-up surveys based on site observations and potential presence. The Biological Scoping Survey report does not serve as the complete and final survey report (unless the scoping process finds no identified or potential ESHAs), but can be added to a formal survey report to circumvent repetition, so long as the net result of the Biological Scoping Survey and follow-up surveys encompasses all required components as outlined in DFG's "Guidelines for Assessing the Effects of Proposed Projects on Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Plants and Natural Communities."