

Wildlife Habitat Assessment of the Crook Property Curry County, Oregon

Prepared for:

Crook Family, LLC
Brookings, OR 97415

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March 17, 2010



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Pacific Habitat Services, Inc. (PHS) conducted a wildlife habitat assessment on the Crook property located in Curry County, Oregon. The property is the site of a proposed destination resort and golf course. The purpose of the assessment was to review the existing quality of wildlife habitat within the property and determine whether the property provides habitat for rare, threatened or endangered species of wildlife.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

The Crook property is located on the southern Oregon coast between Brookings and Gold Beach approximately two miles south of the Pistol River. It covers approximately 422 acres. Its eastern border is US Highway 101. The Pacific Ocean flanks the southern and western edges of the property. The northern half is bordered by a combination of private and federal land. The federal land is the Crook Point Unit of the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge. To the south of the site is the Samuel H. Boardman State Park.

The topography of the site ranges from steep slopes ($\pm 60\%$) to sheer cliffs on the southern portion of the site to gently rolling on the northern part; from sea level the elevation rises to approximately 280 feet in the northeast corner of the property. Three smaller streams are located in the northern portion of the property: Sand Creek, Long Hollow Creek, and an unnamed stream. Burnt Hill Creek flows to the west from east of Highway 101 through the southern portion of the property. It is the largest creek on the property and at one time supplied the water for a salmon hatchery called Pacific Salmon Ranch. The hatchery, which was private, operated between 1984 and 1990 and raised fall Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*).

The site's vegetation is generally tied to the underlying geology. The majority of the site is underlain by sandstone. The southern portion, which is more sparsely vegetated than the northern portion, is dominated by Sitka spruce (*Picea stichensis*) and red alder (*Alnus rubra*). The northern portion is covered with a dense stand of approximately 40-year old Sitka spruce. The very northern edge of the site gives way to sand dunes and is vegetated with shore pine (*Pinus contorta*). A small area of coastal grassland habitat is found on the very southern end of the property.

Due to the generally steep terrain along most of the property's shoreline, the beach habitats are very narrow and composed of fragmented rocks rather than sand. One exception is a cove at the southern end of the property, where Burnt Hill Creek enters the ocean.

The property contains several structures, including vacation rentals, private residences, out buildings and abandoned farm buildings.

3.0 METHODS

The assessment was performed by reviewing pertinent literature, aerial photographs, topographic maps, and a site visit. A data search was requested from the Oregon Natural Heritage Information Center (ORNHIC) that provides records and locations of rare and sensitive species of wildlife and plants found in the area.¹ Local wildlife experts were also contacted to obtain an understanding of the quality of wildlife habitat found on the Crook property and what species might be potentially found there.

4.0 RESULTS

A pedestrian survey of the site revealed the most undisturbed portion to be the northern one-half. Most of this area is covered by a dense stand of second growth Sitka spruce. It also contains an abandoned farmstead, with a few remaining out buildings and a pasture area for about a half dozen horses. Limited clearing of trees in this portion of the site has occurred to facilitate the siting of the golf course fairways and greens.

The central and southern portions of the property have a relatively high incidence of human use including houses, vacation rentals and equipment shops, though the opportunities for human access to the beach are limited.

The ORNHIC data, which is listed in Table 1, shows a number of sensitive species have been reported within the vicinity² of the Crook property.

Table 1. Sensitive species found in the vicinity of the Crook Property, Curry County, Oregon

Common Name	Scientific Name	Federal Status *	State Status **
PLANTS			
Pink sand verbena	<i>Abronia umbellate ssp. breviflora</i>	SOC	LE
Seaside gilia	<i>Gilia millefoliata</i>	SOC	-
Large-flowered goldfields	<i>Lasthenia ornduffii</i>	SOC	C
San Francisco bluegrass	<i>Poa unilateralis</i>	SOC	-
Silvery phacelia	<i>Phacelia argentea</i>	SOC	LT
BIRDS			
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrines anatum</i>	-	SV
Northern spotted owl	<i>Strix occidentalis caurina</i>	LT	LT
REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS			
Del Norte salamander	<i>Plethodon elongatus</i>	SOC	SV
Foothill yellow-legged frog	<i>Rana boylei</i>	SOC	SC/SV
MAMMALS			
Pistol River pocket gopher	<i>Thomomys bottae detumidus</i>	SOC	-

*Federal Status: SOC = Species of Concern, LT = Listed as Threatened.

**State Status: LE = Listed as Endangered, LT = Listed as Threatened, SC or C = Sensitive-Critical, SV = Sensitive-Vulnerable.

¹ The ORNHIC data comes with the caveat that the lack of rare element information from a given area does not mean that there are no significant elements there, only that there is no information known for the site.

² The ORNHIC data includes records of occurrence up to one mile from the property boundary.

State and federal wildlife agency personnel were contacted to gain firsthand knowledge of wildlife in the area. David Ledig, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) said the Crook property does not provide unique or special habitat, but does provide habitat for species of wildlife endemic to southwest Oregon, including small mammals, black bear, and coastal cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki clarki*). Coastal cutthroat trout is considered a species of concern by the USFWS but has no state status³.

Curtis Edwards, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) said the only species of wildlife found within the property that the Department could potentially be concerned about are the Aleutian Canada goose (*Branta canadensis leucopareia*) and coastal cutthroat trout. The Aleutian Canada goose does not have state or federal status, but because of recent recovery efforts is still a species that ODFW continues to monitor.

4.1 Plants

Five plant species have been documented within one mile of the property, but Dave Ledig, USFWS, felt that of the species listed in the ORNHIC data only the large-flowered goldfields was thought to be potentially present on the Crook Property.

4.2 Birds

The property obviously provides habitat for numerous species of birds, but only two species (peregrine falcon and northern spotted owl) were listed in the ORNHIC data as being sighted within one mile of the property.

- The peregrine falcon uses high rocky cliffs (typically over 50 meters high) for nesting and perching sites (Johnsgard 1990). A vantage point at this height provides them with an unobstructed view of surrounding areas. Of the wildlife species found on the ORNHIC data search the peregrine falcon is the most likely species to be seen on the Crook property. Peregrines are known to nest on the island cliffs off of Crook Point and could use the steep bluffs along the coast of the Crook property for roosting.
- The northern spotted owl is associated with mature conifer forests showing old growth characteristics (Thomas et al 1990). This type of habitat does not occur within the property.

4.3 Reptiles and Amphibians

One reptile, the Del Norte salamander, and one amphibian, the foothill yellow-legged frog, were listed in the ORNHIC data.

- In coastal areas the Del Norte Salamander is associated with talus or rocky substrates (Diller and Wallace, 1994). It is believed that this species utilizes the floor of older or mature forests during the breeding season. Neither of these habitat types are found on the Crook property.

³ The coastal cutthroat was not listed in the ORNHIC data, but State and Federal biologists as well as the landowner believe this species was, at least historically, found on the property.

- The foothill yellow-legged frog is primarily a stream dwelling species and unlike other *ranid* frogs in California, Oregon, and Washington, foothill yellow-legged frogs mate and lay eggs exclusively in streams and rivers. The streams that originate on or cross the Crook property could provide habitat for this species.

4.4 Mammals

The Pistol River pocket gopher is the only mammal species listed in ORNHIC as being sighted within one mile of the property.

- Little is known about the specific habitat requirements of this species other than it is an isolated subspecies of *Thomomys bottae* found along the Pistol River in Curry County. In general, pocket gophers are found in moist meadows, pastures, grasslands and riparian areas where it requires deep soils (Csuti et al 2001). While the soils found on the site (Bullgulch, Hunterscove, Bullards, Ferrelo and Horse Prairie) can be quite deep (<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>) the property is almost entirely forested. There are no meadows, only small areas that are used as pasture, very narrow (if any) riparian areas and only one small grassy headland. Due to the limited amount of possible habitat it is unlikely that the Pistol River pocket gopher is found on the Crook Property.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Crook property currently provides habitat for a suite of wildlife species that would typically be found in relatively young forest communities of southwest Oregon. There are no documented rare, threatened or endangered species of wildlife on the property, though there is a possibility that large-flowered goldfields could be found on its limited grassy headland habitat.

While the Crook property itself doesn't harbor rare or unique habitats it is situated adjacent to areas that are rare and unique. The islands off the coast of Crook Point are part of the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, which harbors an abundant and diverse population of nesting seabirds. According to the *Catalog of Oregon Seabird Colonies*, 55% of all seabirds nesting along the Oregon coast are found between Cape Blanco and the California border. In addition, according to the *Oregon Islands, Three Arch Rocks, and Cape Meares National Wildlife Refuges Comprehensive Conservation Plan/ Wilderness Stewardship Plan*, the Mack Reef archipelago itself supports the second-largest concentration of nesting seabirds in Oregon

The Crook Point Unit was purchased by the USFWS to protect sensitive seabird nesting colonies and pinniped (marine mammal) haul-out sites located within Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) from human disturbance and trespass. The purposes of acquisition were to provide permanent protection to one of the few remaining undisturbed headlands on the Oregon coast, resulting in increased protection to major near-shore seabird breeding colonies and pinniped pupping and haul-out sites within the Oregon Islands NWR, and to protect a relatively undisturbed intertidal zone, unique geological formations, rare plants, and cultural resource sites. While human access is prohibited, the Crook Point Unit does not contain the necessary wilderness features to qualify for wilderness status.

The major concern both the USFWS and ODFW have with the proposed development of the Crook property is the potential for physical disturbance to sensitive areas on the Crook Point Unit. This impact would result primarily from resort visitors trespassing onto the refuge. According to the NWR's *Comprehensive Conservation Plan* only 50% of the boundary between the Crook Point Unit and the surrounding private lands are currently posted.

We understand that the Crook family and its representatives have met several times with USFWS and ODFW to discuss the proposed resort and to work towards ways to ensure potential impacts are minimized or avoided. Methods to minimize impacts that have been recommended include:

- Restricting access from resort guests to the Cook Point Unit through fencing and signage and education
- Decrease the potential for light pollution by requiring dark sky lighting throughout the resort
- Effective trash collection to control potential predators, such as rats, raccoons, etc.
- Control domestic predators (i.e. cats and dogs)
- Control invasive plants (e.g. tansy ragwort, Canada thistle) and adopt an Integrated Pest Management Plan
- Fence off access from the resort

These and other options should ensure the resort will have minimal effect on the Crook Point Unit.

Agency concerns about the resort's effects on the Aleutian Canada goose have to do with its wintering habits and habitat preferences. This species nests in the Aleutian Islands, but is commonly found in agricultural fields along the Oregon and California coasts, where it eats young shoots of grass and grains. Changes in land use away from agriculture to residential or commercial uses threaten wintering areas for this species. However, the Crook property currently has very little, if any, agricultural areas suitable for wintering Aleutian Canada geese. The resort may implement measures to manage the geese should they be attracted to the golf course.

To protect habitats that may harbor the coastal cutthroat trout and the foothill yellow-legged frog the resort should adopt enhanced stream buffers that physically protect the creeks. This would include a physical separation from adjacent land uses and the enhancement of the riparian areas with native plantings.

Much of the resort property does not currently provide high quality wildlife habitat. However, the proposed resort presents an opportunity to control non-native species, implement native plantings, improve fish and amphibian habitat within the creeks, and to control any potential for negative effects on the adjacent Crook Point Unit.