

# OFFICE OF THE AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER

Tony Linegar  
Agricultural Commissioner  
Sealer of Weights and Measures



133 Aviation Boulevard , Suite 110  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403-1077  
(707) 565-2371 Fax (707) 565-3850  
[www.sonoma-county.org/agcomm](http://www.sonoma-county.org/agcomm)

## GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING BIOLOGICAL RESOURCE STUDIES OR ASSESSMENTS

The following guidelines are intended to help applicants and/or their representatives determine (a) who should be considered qualified to conduct biological resource studies or assessments, (b) how the fieldwork should be conducted, and (c) what information should be contained.

**BACKGROUND:** Biological resource studies and assessments are conducted to determine the presence or absence of listed animals and plants and the effects of a proposed vineyard or orchard site development on those species.

**PERSONS QUALIFIED TO PREPARE:** Consultant(s) must possess the following qualifications:

- a. experience in conducting wildlife and floristic field surveys;
- b. knowledge of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife, plant taxonomy, and plant community ecology;
- c. familiarity with the plants and wildlife of the area, including all listed plant and animal species that may be found there;
- d. familiarity with the various habitats within which these listed plants and animals are likely to be found;
- e. familiarity with the appropriate state and federal statutes and procedures related to animal and plant surveys and collection; and
- f. experience in analyzing the impacts of development on native plants and wildlife.

**FIELD SURVEY PROTOCOL:** Field surveys must be conducted in a manner that will locate the habitats of any listed plant or animal species that may be present. Specifically, a biological survey shall be

- a. **Conducted in the field.** If a field survey is not conducted because the site is well understood and it presents no issues with respect to listed species, the reasoning shall be explained and shall include an explanation of how and why the site is well understood.
- b. **Floristic in nature.** Every plant observed shall be identified to the extent necessary to determine its listing status. In order to properly characterize the site and document the completeness of the survey, a complete list of plants observed on the site should be included.

- c. **Conducted in a manner that is consistent with conservation ethics.** Collections (voucher specimens) of listed species, or suspected listed species should be made only when such actions would not jeopardize the continued existence of the population and in accordance with applicable state and federal permit requirements. A collecting permit from the Habitat Conservation Planning Branch of the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is required for collection of state-listed plant species. Voucher specimens should be deposited at recognized public herbaria for future reference. Photography should be used to document plant identification and habitats whenever possible, but especially when the population cannot withstand collection of voucher specimens.
- d. **Conducted using systematic field techniques in all habitats of the site** to ensure a thorough coverage of potential impact areas.
- e. **Well documented.** When a listed species is located, a California Native Species (or Community) Field Survey Form or equivalent written form, accompanied by a copy of the appropriate portion of a 7.5 minute topographic map with the occurrence mapped, should be completed and submitted to the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB). Locations may be best documented using global positioning systems (GPS) and presented in map and digital forms as these tools become more accessible.

**REPORT CONTENTS:** Biological Resource Studies or Assessments should at a minimum contain the following information:

- a. **Project description**, including a detailed map of the project location and study area;
- b. A written description of the **biological setting** of the site and the Biological Resources Evaluation Area (an area that includes all lands within 1 mile of the boundaries of the parcel(s) involved, as well as the County-defined drainage upstream and including the subject parcel(s)) utilizing a standard community classification scheme for identifying natural communities from species data. The description should discuss the regional context, including both drainage and the natural community (ies) in the area and larger regional habitat. The description should note any habitats that do not fit into the classification scheme or are unique to the area, and include a vegetation map showing the vegetation (including wetland) types found on and around the project site and in the Biological Resources Evaluation Area;
- c. Detailed description of **survey methodology** utilized including a map clearly showing the boundaries of the area surveyed and survey routes, dates of field survey, total person-hours spent thereon, and the name of the field investigator(s);
- d. **Results** including detailed maps showing the likely location of the wildlife corridors present in relation to the proposed activities, any raptor nests, wildlife dens or burrows observed, any unique species discovered to be exclusive, rare, or not

typical to this part of the County, any unique or limited habitats found within the vicinity, unique plants with limited populations such as redwood trees, and the expected distributions of each listed plant found or likely to be present. The results should include a table compiled from the standard sources (i.e., CNDDDB) and the preparer's knowledge of the area and the listed species likely present, that includes (1) a list of all the listed animals and plants that are known to occur or may utilize or be found in or around the project area, (2) a list of the habitat(s) each utilizes or are found in, (3) an indication as to whether or not this(ese) habitat type(s) is(are) present, (4) a statement as to whether or not the species involved was observed; (5) a conclusion as to whether or not the animal/plant is likely to be present or utilize the site and (6) a justification for any negative occurrence conclusions reached;

- e. **An assessment of potential impacts**, including a map clearly showing the distribution of each listed species found in relation to proposed activities. For each listed animal and plant species that is likely to utilize the site/be present, the results should indicate the likely effect of the proposed vineyard or orchard site development on both site-specific and cumulative populations. The results should also discuss the biological consequences associated with habitat fragmentation, including species exclusion, isolation, extinction edge effects and changes in species composition;
- f. **Recommended additional focused species-specific surveys** needed to determine the presences and/or the impacts to those listed plant and animal species that are likely to be affected;
- g. **Recommended measures** to avoid potential adverse impacts to listed plant and animal species if there are any such impacts; and
- h. **References** cited, persons contacted, herbaria visited, and the location of voucher specimens.

**REPORT SUBMITTALS:** If the Biological Resource Study or Assessment addresses, delineates, or makes recommendations regarding any of the items identified below, the Study or Assessment must be included in the application packet.

- Stream setbacks
- Lakes and pond setbacks
- Wetland setbacks
- Other setback recommendations