University of California
Agriculture and Natural Resources

UC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION HUMBOLDT

5630 South Broadway
Eureka, CA 95503
(707) 445-7351 office
(707) 444-9334 fax
http://cehumboldt.ucdavis.edu
http://ucanr.org

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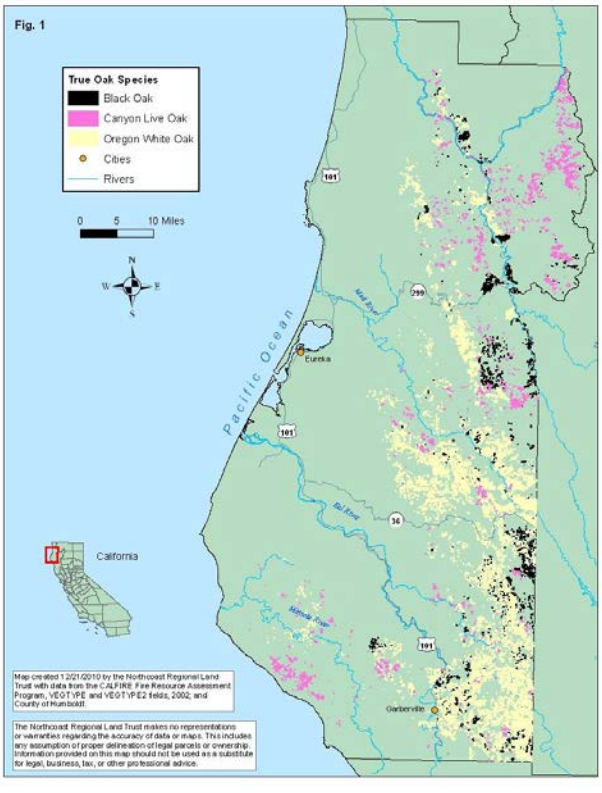
Eric Huff
Regulations Coordinator
State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection
PO Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

Dear Eric,

I am writing to share my interest in and support for the development of new standards for the conservation of *Quercus spp*. woodlands.

The loss of oak woodlands to native conifer encroachment is a major conservation concern in California, resulting in associated losses of wildlife habitat, traditional uses, biodiversity, and other ecosystem services. These concerns – compounded by development pressures, evolving understanding of fire's role in California landscapes, and health threats (e.g., sudden oak death) – have drawn increasing attention in recent years, and oak woodland conservation and restoration efforts have gained momentum. Several California counties have developed oak woodland conservation plans, and agencies have been distributing funds for cost-share and incentive programs aimed at conserving and restoring these important ecosystems. I am pleased to know that the Board of Forestry is ready to address this critical issue.



My office is currently involved in conducting a multi-year research project in collaboration with scientists from UC Berkeley and Humboldt State University. Our project seeks to learn more about the rate and extent of conifer encroachment in the oak woodlands of Humboldt and Mendocino Counties, to characterize the impacts of this encroachment on a number of critical ecosystem variables, and explore oak regeneration and conifer recruitment issues in a changing climate – information that is critical for conservation and restoration plans to both take shape and endure. After our field research is complete, in 2015 we will communicate results to land management agencies, counties, private landowners, and other stakeholders through workshops and publications (including peer-reviewed papers, extension publications, and contributions to the UC oak website); and a multi-state symposium on oak woodland issues in southwestern Oregon and northern California. We will also share science-based outreach materials to inform the restoration programs of CAL FIRE and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service.

In our research efforts we have observed a number of challenges that could be pertinent to policy development for oak woodlands conservation. These challenges include accuracy of base maps, limited historical air photos, varying sizes of woodlands, species differences, etc. Specifically:

1. While there are general maps of *Quercus* distribution, they are not fine enough scale to be useful at site specific locations. Please see included figure using FRAP data and produced by the North Coast Regional Land Trust and Humboldt State University students as an example;
2. Historical air photos are not widely available to be used as a base standard. There are significant differences in early photography between and within counties;
3. Oak woodlands have varying sizes. In many cases there are small stands of oaks or thin rings of oaks that follow the perimeters of prairies. These small stands have conservation values, but may be harder to track than woodlands of greater sizes;
4. Encroachment is occurring in a variety of *Quercus* species, with deciduous oak woodlands (e.g. *Quercus garryana and Quercus kelloggii*) experiencing the greatest impact;
5. Large diameter conifers need to be removed from these encroached oak woodlands in a way that does not cause residual stand damage. If the removal only permitted smaller diameter conifer removal this would still allow for significant seed source production within these woodlands;

I have observed growing interest in oak woodland conservation across the north coast. As these woodlands have significant biologic importance, landowners are increasing interested in restoring these stands. Additionally, they recognize that these woodlands have financial importance to them as they support healthy wildlife and game populations among other attributes, however, the current rules serve as a barrier to these efforts.

We appreciate your interest and attention to this issue. If we can provide any additional information please feel free to contact me.

Best regards,

Yana Valachovic, RPF #2740
County Director and Forest Advisor
yvala@ucdavis.edu

UC Cooperative Extension
Humboldt County