STATE OF CALIFORNIA

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE *of* PLANNING AND RESEARCH

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE AND PLANNING UNIT

EDMUND G. BROWN JR.
GOVERNOR

KEN ALEX
DIRECTOR

October 13, 2014

Received By

OCT 14 '14

Professional Forester Registration

Matt Dias
Forestry and Fire Protection, Board of
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

Subject: Soquel Demonstration State Forest Management Plan
SCH#: 2014092029

Dear Matt Dias:

The enclosed comment (s) on your Negative Declaration was (were) received by the State Clearinghouse after the end of the state review period, which closed on October 8, 2014. We are forwarding these comments to you because they provide information or raise issues that should be addressed in your final environmental document.

The California Environmental Quality Act does not require Lead Agencies to respond to late comments. However, we encourage you to incorporate these additional comments into your final environmental document and to consider them prior to taking final action on the proposed project.

Please contact the State Clearinghouse at (916) 445-0613 if you have any questions concerning the environmental review process. If you have a question regarding the above-named project, please refer to the ten-digit State Clearinghouse number (2014092029) when contacting this office.

Sincerely,

Scott Morgan
Director, State Clearinghouse

Enclosures
cc: Resources Agency

1400 10th Street P.O. Box 3044 Sacramento, California 95812-3044
(916) 445-0613 FAX (916) 323-3018 www.opr.ca.gov

State of California
Department of Fish and Wildlife

late
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Flex your POWER

Memorandum

Date: October 7, 2014

RECEIVED
OCT 10 2014
STATE CLEARING HOUSE

To: Mr. Matt Dias
State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection
Post Office Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244

From: Scott Wilson, Regional Manager
California Department of Fish and Wildlife – Bay Delta Region, 7329 Silverado Trail, Napa, California 94558

Subject: Proposed Soquel Demonstration State Forest Management Plan, Initial Study of a Negative Declaration, SCH #2014092029, Santa Cruz County

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has reviewed the Initial Study/Negative Declaration (IS/ND) for the proposed Soquel Demonstration State Forest Management Plan (Project).

As Trustee for the State's fish and wildlife resources, CDFW has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and their habitat for the benefit and use by the people of California. As a Responsible Agency, CDFWadministers the California Endangered Species Act (CESA), the Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement (LSAA) Program and other provisions of the Fish and Game Code that afford protection to the state's fish and wildlife public trust resources. Pursuant to our jurisdiction, CDFW submits the following comments on the IS/ND regarding potentially significant impacts to sensitive resources associated with the proposed Project.

Project Location and Description

The proposed Project area is located in central Santa Cruz County. Soquel Demonstration State Forest (SDSF) comprises 2,681 acres of which 2,677 acres are forest or woodland vegetation. SDSF is situated approximately eight miles northeast of Santa Cruz and 18 miles south of San Jose. The Forest of Nisene Marks State Park adjoins a majority of SDSF's southern boundary. The northeast corner of SDSF shares a common corner with lands owned by Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. The remaining perimeter of SDSF is bounded by a myriad of smaller, privately owned parcels. The nearest community is Soquel, about seven miles to the south.

The Project includes implementation of the following five primary components and programs: resource protection and enhancement, demonstration and education, research, timber management, and recreation. SDSF management goals will be achieved by meeting a series of specific objectives, listed within the General Forest Management Plan, for Biota, Fisheries, Watershed Assessment, Demonstration and Education, Timber Management, Research, Recreation, Resource Protection, Archeology, and Roads.

Santa Cruz Kangaroo Rat

The Santa Cruz kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys venustus venustus*), a California species of special concern, is a small rodent that is endemic to the Santa Cruz Sandhills. The California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) indicates that a population of Santa Cruz kangaroo rat potentially exists within or adjacent to the Project boundaries. The IS/ND does not include Santa Cruz kangaroo rat as a species that may occur in the Project boundaries, and it is unclear from the IS/ND whether chaparral habitats present within the SDSF property were assessed for the presence of this species. CDFW recommends that subsequent environmental documents prepared for the activities described in the Management Plan indicate whether on-site chaparral habitats are suitable for this species and address any potential impacts associated with activities in this habitat.

Marbled Murrelet

The marbled murrelet is a state endangered seabird which, in California, uses coastal coniferous forests from Del Norte to Santa Cruz County during the breeding season (March 24 to September 15). Marbled murrelets have been documented nesting in mature, old-growth forests as well as younger forest stands with late-seral elements such as large trees with moss-covered limbs >6 inches wide or limb defects (McShane *et al.* 2004). Mature conifer stands often have a complex tree crown structure with gaps in the canopy which allow access by adult murrelets to and from nest platforms during parental incubation exchanges and chick feeding (Ralph *et al.* 1995).

According to CDFW records, suitable marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) habitat exists within the Project boundaries, and occupied behavior has been observed in adjacent watersheds. Large diameter mature trees are often part of a highly fragmented landscape, and retention of these legacy trees maintains and promotes the development of structural complexities that provide nesting, shelter, and foraging habitat to a variety of wildlife species. CDFW recommends that subsequent environmental documents prepared for the activities described in the Management Plan analyze and mitigate for any impacts to marbled murrelets and their habitat. While murrelets may not have been recently encountered in the Project area, future occupancy is possible based on the presence of suitable habitat within the Project area and the proximity of occupied stands.

Grassland Habitat

Environmental Setting, page 12 states the following:

> *Approximately four acres of SDSF are comprised of grassland and mixed chaparral communities. SDSF's grasslands primarily contain wild oats and annual fescue grasses. Most grasslands are being encroached upon by coyote brush, lupine, poison oak, and Douglas-fir.*

CDFW recommends that subsequent environmental documents prepared for the activities described in the Management Plan address impacts to grassland and mixed chaparral habitat and provide mitigation to minimize disturbance to these plant communities.

If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Julie Coombes, Environmental Scientist, at (707) 944-5529; or Ms. Randi Adair, Senior Environmental Scientist (Supervisory), at (707) 944-5596.

cc: State Clearinghouse

Literature Cited

McShane, C., T. Hamer, H. Carter, G. Swartzman, V. Friesen, D. Ainley, R. Tressler, K. Nelson, A. Burger, L. Spear, T. Mohagen, R. Martin, L. Henkel, K. Prindle, C. Strong, and J. Keany. 2004. Evaluation report for the 5-year status review of the marbled murrelet in Washington, Oregon, and California. Unpublished report. EDAW, Inc. Seattle, Washington. Prepared for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 1. Portland, Oregon.

Ralph, C.J., G.L. Hunt, Jr., M.G. Raphael, and J.F. Piatt. Technical Editors. 1995. Ecology and Conservation of the Marbled Murrelet. U.S. Forest Service, Gen. Tech. Rep. PSW-GTR-152, Pacific Southwest Research Station, Albany, California.