

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF BIOLOGICAL RESOURCE TOPICS**

**APPENDIX 3.15-A****GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF BIOLOGICAL RESOURCE TOPICS****SENSITIVE VEGETATION COMMUNITIES**

Sensitive vegetation communities are natural communities and habitats that are either unique, of relatively limited distribution in the region, or of particularly high wildlife value. These resources have been defined by federal, state, and local government conservation programs. The source used to determine the sensitive status of vegetation communities was the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB). Each type of vegetation community is classified and priority ranked based on distribution, common or limited, or threats to conservation and preservation. The most sensitive of these plant communities—termed “natural communities of special concern,” “high-inventory priority” or “CNDDDB-sensitive”—are identified in *Preliminary Description of the Terrestrial Natural Communities of California* (Holland 1986) and catalogued by the CNDDDB.

**SENSITIVE PLANT SPECIES**

Sensitive plant species include those that have been afforded special status and/or recognition by federal and state resource agencies, as well as private conservation organizations. In general, the principal reason an individual taxon (species, subspecies, or variety) is given such recognition is the documented or perceived decline or limitations of its population size or geographical extent and/or distribution resulting in most cases from habitat loss. Sources used to determine the sensitive status of plant species include the CNDDDB (California Department of Fish and Game 2002) and the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) electronic inventory (Skinner and Pavlik 1994).

**SENSITIVE WILDLIFE SPECIES**

Sensitive wildlife species include those that have been afforded special status and/or recognition by federal and state resource agencies, as well as private conservation organizations. In general, the principal reason an individual taxon (species, subspecies, or variety) is given such recognition is the documented or perceived decline or limitations of its population size or geographical extent and/or distribution, resulting in most cases from habitat loss. Sources used to determine the sensitive status of wildlife species include the CNDDDB (California Department of Fish and Game 2002), the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships database System (California Department of Fish and Game 2003), lists available on the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s Web site, and contacts with federal and state resource agencies.

**WILDLIFE MOVEMENT/MIGRATION CORRIDORS**

Wildlife movement/migration corridors link together areas of suitable wildlife habitat that are otherwise separated by rugged terrain, changes in vegetation, or human disturbance. The fragmentation of open space areas by urbanization tends to create isolated islands of wildlife habitat. Several studies have shown that in the absence of habitat linkages, which facilitate wildlife movements between adjoining open space areas, some wildlife species, especially the larger and more mobile mammals, will not likely persist over time. This is because fragmentation and/or the isolation of habitat areas can prohibit the infusion of new individuals and genetic information (MacArthur and Wilson 1967; Soule 1987; Harris and Gallagher 1989; Bennett 1990). Wildlife corridors can often mitigate the effects of this fragmentation by 1) allowing animals to move between remaining habitats, thereby allowing depleted populations to be replenished; 2) providing escape routes from fire, predators, and human disturbances, thus reducing the risk that catastrophic events such as fire or disease will result in population or local species extinction; and 3) serving as travel routes for individual animals as they move within their home ranges in search of

food, water, mates, and other needs (Noss 1983; Farhig and Merriam 1985; Simberloff and Cox 1987; Harris and Gallagher 1989).

## JURISDICTIONAL WATERS

Lakes, rivers, streams, and other water bodies are termed "jurisdictional waters" when they are protected by federal and/or state law. Special aquatic sites, which include wetlands, are considered an important subset of jurisdictional waters.

Under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) of 1972, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has the authority to regulate activity that could discharge fill or dredged material or otherwise adversely modify "waters of the U.S."

The term *waters of the U.S.* as defined in Code of Federal Regulations (33 C.F.R. 328.3[a]; 40 C.F.R. 230.3[s]) includes:

- All waters that are currently used, were used in the past, or may be susceptible to use in interstate or foreign commerce, including all waters which are subject to the ebb and flow of the tide;
- All interstate waters, including interstate wetlands (*wetlands* are defined by the federal government [C.F.R. 328.3(b), 1991] as "those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions");
- All other waters such as intrastate lakes, rivers, streams (including intermittent streams), mud flats, sand flats, wetlands, sloughs, prairie potholes, wet meadows, playa lakes, or natural ponds, the use, degradation, or destruction of which could affect interstate or foreign commerce including any such waters which are or could be used by interstate or foreign travelers for recreational or other purposes; or from which fish or shellfish are or could be taken and sold in interstate or foreign commerce; or which are used or could be used for industrial purposes by industries in interstate commerce;
- All impoundments of waters otherwise defined as waters of the U.S. under the definition;
- Tributaries of waters identified in the above items;
- Territorial seas;
- Wetlands adjacent to waters (other than waters that are themselves wetlands) identified in the previous items; and
- Waters of the U.S. that do not include prior converted cropland. Notwithstanding the determination of an area's status as prior converted cropland by any other federal agency, for the purposes of the CWA, the final authority regarding CWA jurisdiction remains with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA [328.3(a)(8) added 58 F.R. 45035, Aug. 25, 1993]).

In 1987, USACE published a manual that standardized the manner in which waters, including wetlands, were to be delineated nationwide. To determine whether areas appearing to be wetlands are subject to USACE jurisdiction (i.e., are "jurisdictional" wetlands), a wetland delineation must be performed. Under normal circumstances, three positive indicators must be present for an area to be classified as a jurisdictional wetland: 1) hydrology providing permanent or periodic inundation by groundwater or surface water, 2) hydrophytic vegetation, and 3) hydric soils. Wetlands and other waters that could fall within USACE's jurisdiction are referred to as jurisdictional waters.