

activity, as well as other recreation uses, both equestrian and hiking which continues to occur. Disturbance effects will be discussed further later in this document. There is minimal potential for effects to habitat for any of the potentially affected terrestrial species from continued use of the area and trails. The riding of horses would not affect canopy closure, tree size, distribution, or down woody material. The maintenance of the trails would continue the removal of snags and dying trees identified as hazards in the immediate vicinity of the trail. Most of these hazard trees would remain on site as down logs, as no commercial removal is planned. The removal of hazard trees would reduce some potential nest and denning trees/snags for species such as bald eagle, great gray owl, and northern goshawk, and marten. The impacts to herbaceous and riparian vegetation from the trail rides are believed to be minimal, as there are few times when the horses are stopped and would have opportunity to graze/browse on herbaceous material along the trails utilized. The guides try to keep the riders moving for the entire ride as the horses are difficult for the novice customers to get moving again if they do stop. The impacts of continued use of the area for guided trail rides on terrestrial wildlife habitat are inconsequential.

Aquatic TES Species Habitat: The only TES species present or with potential habitat in the area is the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (previously mountain yellow-legged frog). Potential impacts to this species habitat are limited to riparian zones, and stream crossings. It is unlikely that the use of the trail would result in direct crushing events for this species, and as was described for the herbaceous vegetation, riparian vegetation effects are believed to be minimal to none do to the limited time in which the horses and these habitats would be in contact. As the potential impacts to aquatic habitat are small to non-existent, the issuance of the permit would not be expected to affect habitat to a discernable level.

Disturbance Effects: There has likely been, and likely will be some level disturbance from the use of the trails by guided equestrian trips. Where TES species use, and the permitted trail use, overlap there may have been, and continue to be, temporary displacement of individuals and possible disruption of foraging activity. Nesting, denning, and reproduction is not believed to have been, or expected to be affected, as the use is ongoing and there is likely some level of avoidance and/or acclimation by these species near the trails used. Levels of potential disturbance may be lower for equestrian rider us, than hikers, as some species show a great reaction to humans walking than on horseback.

Cumulative Effects

Reissue of the permit would not increase or decrease cumulative effects for these species, as there would be no change from the present conditions with the reissue.

Determination of Effects

It is my determination that this project will have no effect/impact on the following species, or species viability:

Valley elderberry longhorn beetle
Peregrine falcon
California spotted owl
Western red-bat

Great gray owl
Willow flycatcher
Pacific fisher
California wolverine
Townsend's big-eared bat
Northwestern Pond Turtle
Northern Leopard Frog
Foothill Yellow-Legged Frog
Yosemite Toad
Hardhead (*fish*)

The proposed action may affect/impact individuals but is not likely to result in a trend toward Federal listing or loss of viability for the following species:

Bald eagle
Northern goshawk
American marten
Sierra Nevada red fox
Pallid bat
Sierra Nevada Yellow-Legged Frog

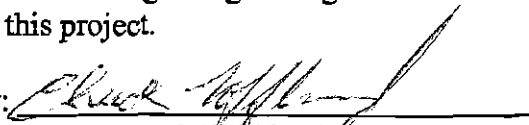
Recommendation(s):

1. Should any TES species be located associated with this project the district biology staff should be informed, and steps taken to evaluate, and mitigate any possible effects not covered by this evaluation/assessment.

Summation:

Further Biological Analysis is not needed. This documents completion of the steps outlined in the 2670 section of USFS Manual regarding Biological Evaluations for Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species for this project.

Prepared & Approved By:


Wildlife Biologist

Date:

3/22/2010