

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

NORTH CENTRAL COAST DISTRICT
455 MARKET STREET, SUITE 300
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105
PHONE: (415) 904-5260
FAX: (415) 904-5400
WEB: WWW.COASTAL.CA.GOV



W11b

Application No. 2-24-0241 (Caltrans Sonoma Safety Improvements)

JUNE 13, 2024

CORRESPONDENCE

Habitat Description-American Badger, Wildlife Corridor, Habitat Support for Species

12424 Mill Street, Bloomfield, CA

Provided by Susan Kirks, Naturalist

The 2.48 acre property of 12424 Mill Street in Bloomfield, CA comprises habitat for multiple species, including the special status American Badger (*Taxidea taxus*). Notably, American Badger is a native mammal in California and a Species of Special Concern since 1987. Badger populations have diminished due to habitat loss from development, habitat fragmentation and death from vehicle strike. While the variety of trees and low and middle story shrubs are observed to support many species, the grassland of the property comprises habitat for American Badger.

This property is located in the wildlife corridor connecting West Petaluma to the Sonoma County coast. The wildlife corridor supports terrestrial mammals – Badgers, Bobcats, Black-tailed Deer and Coyotes.

The property is part of or primary as a natal territory (adult female badger in residence). Bloomfield and grassland properties in the community are intact habitat for badgers with availability of prey of pocket gophers and meadow voles, along with year-round access to fresh water. The stability of habitat without human encroachment is vitally important for adult female badgers to safely give birth and raise their young from early winter through summer months. (The adjacent large 80+ acre property also comprises part of the wildlife corridor and important habitat for badgers and other species.)

The pregnant adult female badger will create her burrow complex in late December and give birth to cubs in late January or early February. The female hunts during daytime and protects her cubs at night until cubs are approximately 3-4 months of age (March-April) and can emerge from the burrow complex and begin to learn to dig and play. Seclusion of the grassland of 12424 Mill Street without human encroachment is critically important for stability of the adult female badger in her territory.

Seasonal behaviors of badgers include mating from late September through early December, for a pregnant female burrow complex creation and birth, raising young, January through late May, and dispersal of juvenile badgers to seek a new territory June-August.

Conservation of 12424 Mill Street without disturbance contributes to integrity of the wildlife corridor and maintaining connectivity for natural movement patterns of male badgers. The property and corridor support stability for dispersal patterns of juvenile badgers who will leave their mother badger in early summer and seek an independent territory.

American Badger is a keystone species for grassland and coastal prairie ecosystems. Females anchor their natal territory, contributing to perceived safety for other mothers, such as Black-tailed Deer and Striped Skunks, along with availability of prey for species like Gray Foxes, Owls and other Raptors. Badgers' exceptional digging skills—employed as they seek prey--

contribute to soil aeration and grassland health. If male badgers access the property and create a sleeping burrow, then leave to move through the natural range of movement, the abandoned burrow is often re-used as a ready-made home by other wildlife.

Notably, in the other natal territory near Bloomfield, an erythristic badger has been observed in habitat. Genetic variations such as leucism or erythrism observed in the future at 12424 Mill Street are requested to be photographed if possible and reported to Naturalist Susan Kirks who maintains documentation of habitat, badger sightings, and movement patterns in Sonoma County and the North Bay (susankirks@sbcglobal.net, 707-241-5548).

Activities – Land Maintenance and Potential Impacts

Mowing the grassland for fire prevention around the residential structure(s) and a 10-foot perimeter from the fence line is advised to be performed in early June. A fence line walk midway uphill is advised the day or two prior to scheduled mowing. Leaving grassland intact without mowing for the top half of the hillside is advised if possible. If foraging evidence is found halfway uphill or beyond, or a burrow, no mowing is advised unless an emergency requires it.

Fresh water should be maintained in the residential ponds year-round.

Nocturnal lighting is not advised and should always be avoided, except as needed for safety in front of the residential structure(s).

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Additional Species Information

The rural and pastoral character of the Bloomfield area, along with habitat connectivity provided via the wildlife corridor, contribute to an abundance of species, as documented on-site at 12424 Mill Street.

Terrestrial wildlife in addition to American Badger are Black-tailed Deer, Bobcat, and Gray Fox. Smaller wildlife also include Striped Skunk, Gray Squirrel, Red Squirrel, Opossum, and Raccoon.

Avian species are also significant for both nesting and over-wintering. Documented species include: Great Egret, Great Blue Heron, California Quail, Turkey Vulture (nesting in Redwood trees), Barn Swallow, Flicker and Woodpecker species (including Red-headed Sapsuckers), Hooded Oriole, Bullock's Oriole, Anna's Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Mourning Dove, Eurasian-collared Dove, Barbary Dove, American Crow, Raven, Goldfinch, House Finch, Northern Mockingbird, Chickadee, Black Phoebe, Say's Phoebe, Dark-eyed Junco, Swainson's Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Red-winged Blackbird, Western Bluebird, Western Scrub Jay, Nuthatch, American Robin, California Towhee, Western Meadowlark, and Great-tailed Grackle.

Other Birds of Prey include Barn Owl, Great-horned Owl, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel and White-tailed Kite. Wild turkeys are also resident on-site and in the area.

The habitat representing mature trees, mid and low story vegetation with grassland and maintained water sources as well as feeder locations provide the sustained, reliable habitat all of these species need for survival and safe nesting and reproduction. Mid and low story vegetation also support pollinators and insects, including: Anise and Black Swallowtail, Western Tiger Swallowtail, Viceroy butterfly, and Hummingbird Moth.

Contributing to the complex and healthy ecosystem surrounding the residential structure(s) at 12424 Mill Street is safe habitat for bats. (add bat information)