

Paula Lane Action Network

American Badger in Sonoma County - State of the Badger 2013

American Badger (*Taxidea Taxus*) continues to be negatively impacted by habitat fragmentation, loss of habitat and ability to range and forage, human encroachment through development and taking of habitat, and other barriers, such as cement traffic K-rail barriers along the Hwy 101 corridor, preventing an east-west crossing by a West Petaluma-based badger. In Summer 2013, a juvenile badger attempting to cross from west to east near the Cotati grade of Hwy 101, in the southbound direction, was struck and killed.

The number of reported killed badgers during Summer months of June through August – dispersal time for young badgers - was less in 2013 than 2012, approximately 3, compared to 5 the prior year. These are sightings reported to PLAN and are by no means a complete number.

The American Badger population in South Sonoma County, West Petaluma, has been severely negatively impacted by loss of a 6-acre contiguous habitat area to the now protected Paula Lane open space property. That property had been utilized by a female badger for birthing and raising of young for 3 consecutive years from 2010 to 2012 after 11 years of dedicated effort to maintain and sustain quiet, dark nights, no human encroachment and protection of the 11 acres at Paula Lane and Sunset Drive, making the entirety of the 100-year-old habitat area on Paula Lane 17+ acres. The Bioconsultant LLC habitat survey of 2003 mapped this area. The prey base of gophers, voles and mice for those 6 acres, formerly abundant, is now destroyed and has been lost. This was caused by owners who purchased the property in a foreclosure process, illegally graded, installed nonclimb fencing and night lighting, and displaced all wildlife as well as blocked the movement corridor.

Other area wildlife, such as red-shouldered hawks who had historically nested in tall trees nearby, always accessing a rich prey base on Paula Lane, were negatively impacted and have been displaced, along with white-tailed kites, great horned owls, and the beloved area deer who resided on the 17+ acres and gave birth to their young and raised them on Paula Lane. In 2012, PLAN received over 60 inquiries about intense destruction, vegetation and tree removal, occurring next to the open space property. Although many requests to the CA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife and Sonoma County Planning were made, with outreach occurring to the owners, they did not stop. They continued the complete destruction of documented habitat. A subdivision proposal to add 2 lots to the property was filed and the owners waited to file the biological assessment for a year and a half, until the habitat destruction was complete. The subdivision proposal review continues at the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Division in Santa Rosa.

The Paula Lane badgers, as they had become known in the San Francisco Bay region, made a valiant effort to remain in their longstanding habitat. Summer of 2012 and 2013 demonstrated burrowing activity,

literally, at fencelines along Sunset Drive and Paula Lane, a dangerous location for badger overnight stays, but nonetheless an attempt to remain in their habitat. By October 2013, however, the destroyed habitat, human encroachment, illegally graded road and howling dogs, combined to result in badger (intelligent) perception of persistent danger, with no prey for the badgers, and they were completely displaced and have disappeared from the Paula Lane area.

Biologist Kim Fitts of Bioconsultant LLC who conducted the habitat survey of the Paula Lane lands in 2003, documenting active habitat on the now conserved open space land as well as the adjacent 6-acre property, stated in an opinion letter submitted to the Sonoma County Planner that approval of the subdivision proposal would, in essence, negate the very reason and years of effort to achieve conservation of the important land and natural resources on Paula Lane.

With this negative impact has also come a change of ownership in a property on Cleveland Lane in West Petaluma, with the presence of dogs, where historically badgers were known to burrow and move through the area in the corridor between Helen Putnam Regional Park and Northwest Petaluma. That negative impact pales in comparison, however, to the destroyed habitat area contiguous to the conserved open space land.

The small population of American Badger between West Petaluma and the Sonoma Coast did not experience any known gunshot killings this year, compared to 2012.

The small Sonoma Coast population appears to have remained stable, although the ability for ranging in historic patterns due to habitat fragmentation and development eastward no longer exists. The protected land status of several Sonoma Coast properties as well as respect for the species by area residents and visitors may help the population sustain.

Two sightings in Sebastopol were reported to PLAN in summer of 2013 during dispersal months for juveniles. Site visits confirmed 2 juvenile badgers, one at each location, learning to burrow and forage, remaining on those properties for a limited period of time and then moving on. One property was along the Laguna de Santa Rosa and the other was just outside the city limits of Sebastopol. Again, both property owners, when visited, were welcoming of the badger presence, especially with natural management of gophers near one owner's summer garden.

Also, inland from the Sonoma Coast, in the Occidental area, we have received 2 sighting reports of badgers, both confirmed, and on properties where the badgers are safe, and another habitat report where the badger, again, helped naturally manage a gopher population near a prized garden and orchard and then left its burrow behind for other species to use as a stopover.

In Northeast Sonoma County, a very small badger population exists, documented on 2 protected large acreage properties.

We recently received a report, also, of a dead badger seen in summer 2012 in Sonoma, outside the City limits. The person reporting the sighting of a badger that had been struck and killed was certain what he observed was a badger. However, this is the only sighting in the Sonoma area we have received and will be open to receiving more reports in the future. At present, we do not document the presence of American Badger in Sonoma.

The Pt. Reyes National Seashore small American Badger population appears to be stable. PLAN received reports of Badger presence in one other area of Marin County in 2013. Marinites do not appear to have the blood-thirsty desire to destroy Badgers that some in Sonoma County exhibit

In summary, the American Badger population in West Petaluma from Paula Lane has been severely threatened and is now displaced. Loss of foraging habitat with prey base, blockage of the wildlife corridor and human encroachment jeopardized the population for a year and a half until, in October 2013, the destruction and displacement were complete. PLAN is currently focused on opposing a subdivision proposal by individuals who caused this destruction as well as seeking restoration of habitat and undoing of destruction. The Sonoma Coast population of badgers is primarily impacted by human encroachment for recreational purposes and continues to attempt to sustain. The very small population in North East Sonoma County has little to no barriers, except numbers of population to help sustain biodiversity and the species. The Marin County small population appears stable and safe.

In 2013, we also received regional reports of a deceased female badger in Fremont.

This report completed in January 2014. Next annual report to be filed in January 2015.

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To report a sighting of American Badger or for questions, please contact us at:

707-773-3215 or info@paulalaneactionnetwork.org.

Susan Kirks is the naturalist with American Badger expertise with our organization, dedicating a significant portion of her life to living among badgers, observing badger behavior, and working to educate and help protect American Badger.

Our gratitude is extended to Kim Fitts, biologist with Bioconsultant LLC, Santa Rosa, CA, our consulting biologist for over 13 years.