



Enjoy the View – Visual Resources Inventory Report

Redwood National and State Parks

Natural Resource Report NPS/REDW/NRR—2017/1456



ON THE COVER

View of the Bald Hills from School House Peak at Redwood National Park

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Abstract

Each unit of the national park system has special visual characteristics that are often a central component to the unit's management and visitor experience. Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP) offer visitors a wide range of visual experiences and the existing scenery is an important way to better understand the connection between natural and cultural resources. Visualizing this connection is a critical part of the visitor experience. As part of Enjoy the View Call to Action, RNSP completed a visual resource inventory that focused on identifying key facts about the scenic views in the Bald Hills area of Redwood National Park. The Bald Hills area was selected because potential changes the visual setting that may be caused by a project to pave a portion of Bald Hills Road. Bald Hills Road is a key component of three cultural resource areas Bald Hills Archeological District, Lyons Ranches Rural Historic District and the Bald Hills Ethnographic Landscape. The inventory was completed according the methodology developed by NPS for assessing and protecting visual resources. The inventory system consists of both fieldwork associated with view description and scenic quality ratings, and an office-based process for assigning importance values to the views. Redwood National and State Parks selected 14 views for the initial visual resource inventory to inform internal view management objectives and help develop external view conservation goals. The results of the inventory identified that two views fell into the very high and four in the high category. The remaining six views were rated as having a moderate scenic inventory value.

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Keywords

Visual resources, scenic resources, scenery, viewsheds, scenic inventory, Redwood National and State Parks

1. Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) Organic Act identifies that the purpose of establishing NPS is to “...conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” With this central mission NPS has been entrusted with some of the most spectacular and historically significant landscapes throughout the country.

Each unit of the national park system has special visual characteristics that are often a central component to the unit’s management and visitor experience. Visitors typically rank scenic views as one of the top five reasons for visiting a park (Kulesza 2013). Inspiring vistas can lift the human spirit, expand our sense of place, and provide connections to the natural world and our history as a country.

From a cultural and historical perspective, views are not just about the scenery, but an important way to better understand the connection between natural and cultural resources. This is especially true in the Bald Hills area of Redwood National and State Parks. Bald Hills Road is a key component of three cultural resource areas Bald Hills Archeological District, Lyons Ranches Rural Historic District and the Bald Hills Ethnographic Landscape. The current road helps in visualizing this connection as part of the landscape and can be an important part of the visitor experience.

The NPS Director Jonathan B. Jarvis issued a 5-year “Call to Action” plan for moving toward its second century. The purpose of the Enjoy the View Call to Action item is to ensure that by protecting visual resources and air quality the NPS can actively preserve these stunning and historically significant views for future generations. Many of these views extend beyond park boundaries and can be affected by actions outside parks that impact air quality and adjoining land use. As part of Enjoy the View Call to Action, Redwood National and State Parks initiated a visual resource inventory for the Bald Hills area of the park.

The specific objectives of the visual resources inventory were to:

1. Conduct visual resource inventory assessment that establish a baseline crucial for park planning and internal and external decisions that may impact scenic, cultural, and natural resources.
2. Identify, describe, and map scenic resources in the Bald Hills area.
3. Provide an understanding of the value of clean air and scenic views and inform collaboration efforts with a variety of stakeholders to protect them.

2. Methods

Visual Resource Inventory Overview

The visual resource inventory focused on identifying key facts about the scenic views in the Bald Hills area of Redwood National and State Parks. The Bald Hills area was selected to better understand the visual landscape because of the potential project to pave a portion of Bald Hills Road. The road is part of a historic district relating to late nineteenth century cattle and sheep ranching, and the change in the visual character of the road could affect the scenic experience in this area of the park.

In the NPS system the unit of inventory is “a view” consisting of the viewpoint, the viewed landscape, and potential viewers, i.e., park visitors. The inventory consists of both fieldwork associated with view description and scenic quality ratings, and an office-based process for assigning importance values to the views. Due to time and weather constraints, 12 of the selected 14 views were evaluated during the Enjoy the View workshop.

The inventory fieldwork process included collection of a variety of descriptive data concerning the viewpoint and view, as well as assessments of the scenic quality of the view and its importance to NPS and NHP visitors. Scenic quality rating is the value of the viewed landscape based on its perceived visual attractiveness, as determined by the aesthetic composition of the visual elements. Scenic quality assessment was conducted in the field September 15-18, 2014. The process included photo documentation, written descriptive information about the viewpoint and viewed landscape that helps inform the rating process, and the scenic quality rating for each view. The scenic quality rating was conducted as a group discussion exercise resulting in a single scenic quality value for the view. The rating was based on scores from three scenic quality factors: landscape character integrity, vividness, and visual harmony. Scenic quality ratings fall into five classes: from A to E based on how high they score. Class A views have the highest scenic quality and Class E the lowest.

The view importance rating identifies NPS and visitor values for the view and also identifies key descriptive information about the viewpoint and viewed landscape that helps inform the rating process. The Importance evaluation of each viewpoint was conducted by staff at Redwood on December 18, 2014. Importance of a view involves assessments of the following factors: view importance, viewed landscape importance, and viewer concern. Each factor was assessed by a multi-disciplinary team of NPS staff and resulted in a single view importance rating for the view. View importance ratings fall into five classes: from 1 to 5 based on how high they score. Class 1 views have the highest view importance and Class 5 the lowest.

The Scenic Inventory Value (SIV) is the combination of the Scenic Quality (SQ) and View Importance Ratings (VIR) and is derived using a matrix (Figure 1) to arrive at one of five possible SIVs ranging from Very Low (VL) to Very High (VH). The SIV is the value for the view that will be recorded in the SCP geospatial database.

Scenic Inventory Value Matrix						
		View Importance Rating				
		1	2	3	4	5
Scenic Quality	A	VH	VH	VH	H	M
	B	VH	VH	H	M	L
	C	H	H	M	L	L
	D	H	M	L	VL	VL
	E	M	L	VL	VL	VL

Figure 1. Scenic Inventory Value Matrix

Inventory Team

The scenic quality fieldwork for the visual resource inventory at Redwood National and State Parks was conducted by an interdisciplinary team that included park management and park staff from natural and cultural resources and interpretation. Team members attended joint workshop at Redwood that included a day of training in the NPS visual inventory process and a field training exercise. Park staff led by the workshop instructors then initiated the field inventory process

View Selection

Redwood selected 14 views for the initial visual resource inventory to achieve internal view management objectives and external view conservation goals (Table 1, Figure 2). The selection process was based on the following general criteria:

- Critical inventory priorities include views that are considered most important to the visitor experience or where there an immediate threat to the view from a proposed project or land management or development decisions.
- Moderate inventory priorities included views that are not likely subject to changes in the view in the near future but where land management or development could affect the view.
- Low inventory priorities included views that are currently somewhat protected from visual intrusions, and if needed, could be included in the inventory at a later time.

Table 1. Views Inventoried at Redwood NSP

#	View Name	UTM Coordinate	UTM Coordinate	View Bearings	Approximate Width of View
1	Redwood Creek Overlook	417114	4567870	170 ⁰ /330 ⁰	160°
2	Elk Camp Prairie	418890	04564680	130 ⁰ /300 ⁰	170°
3	Dolason Prairie TH	420237	4561994	170 ⁰ /300 ⁰	130°
4	Airstrip Prairie	421032	4560853	135 ⁰ /270 ⁰	135°
5	Top of Counts Hill	421590	4560247	130 ⁰ /320 ⁰	190°
6	Maneze Landing	422778	4557347	53 ⁰ /258 ⁰	205°
7	Childs Hill	422381	4559111	56 ⁰ /256 ⁰	200°
8	Childs at Judith's Gate	423539	4557516	48 ⁰ /160 ⁰	112°
9	Robber's Gulch	0425317	4556413	198 ⁰ /0 ⁰	162°
10	Schoolhouse Peak	0425911	4555935	60 ⁰ /280 ⁰	220°
11	Lyon's Ranch TH	0424975	4555513	70 ⁰ /230 ⁰	160°
14	Bald Hills Road at Coyote Peak Road	0427345	4555040	N/A	360 ⁰

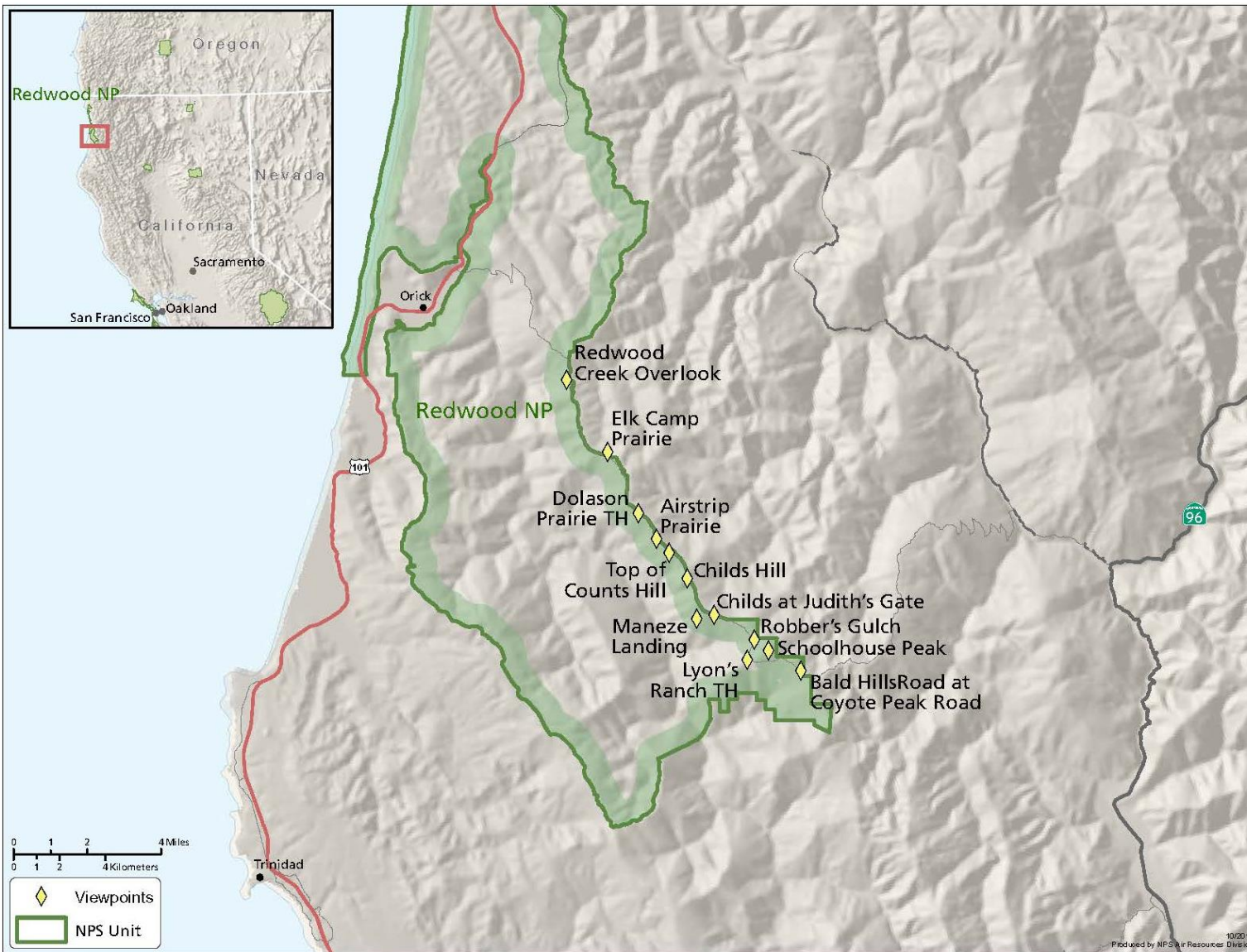


Figure 2. Viewpoints Inventoried at Redwood National and State Parks

3. Summary of Findings

Landscape Character at Redwood National and State Parks

Landscape character is based on the physical objects and patterns in the landscape and represents a distinct, recognizable visual composition that makes one landscape different from another. Redwood National and State Parks are located along the northern California coast and fall in the Coastal Range ecoregion (EPA). In the Bald Hills at RNSP the overall landscape is natural appearing and there are generally few modern visual intrusions that are out of context with the park setting. While the much of the park has a visual character that is primarily defined by moderately to steeply dissected mountains covered by coniferous forests- most typically redwoods- the prairies in the Bald Hills area are low rolling hills covered with grasslands and annuals. The prairies offer a changing landscape throughout the year as the bright greens of spring grasses and masses of purple lupines give way to dark greens and eventually to the straw color of late summer and fall.

The Bald Hills is also the setting for a historic ranching landscape - the Lyons' Ranches Rural Historic District. The mostly undisturbed landscape helps visitors understand the context of late 19th century cattle and sheep ranching in the Bald Hills with the Bald Hills Road evident as a vital corridor linking the ranches with local communities.

Scenic Quality, Importance Ratings

For most of the views inventoried, the foreground offers the visual interest of prairies bordered by woodlands leading to distant views to heavily forested hills and even the ocean in some cases. The views give visitors a broad overview of the variety of landscape types as well as the sense of connection to the historic and cultural landscapes that are an important part of the Bald Hills visitor experience. The Scenic Quality ratings for most of the views fall into Class B with three views identified as having a Scenic Quality rating of A (Table 2). The Bald Hills area of RNSP is generally less visited than other areas of the parks and most viewpoints lack development of interpretive or facilities to support the visitor experience. View Importance ratings ranged from 2-5 with only two views being identified as having high ratings because they are more developed and managed for visitors in addition to having important views of the cultural landscapes of the Bald Hills (Table 2). An overview of the Scenic Quality and View Importance ratings at each location is below. Panoramic photos for each view are in Appendix B.

Table 2. Scenic Quality, View Importance Ratings and Scenic Inventory Values

#	View Name	Scenic Quality Rating	View Importance Rating	Scenic Inventory Value
1	Redwood Creek Overlook	B	3	H
2	Elk Camp Prairie	A	5	M
3	Dolason Prairie Trailhead	B	3	H
4	Airstrip Prairie	B	4	M
5	Top of Counts Hill	B	4	M
6	Maneze Landing	B	4	M
7	Childs Hill	A	4	H
8	Childs at Judith's Gate	B	3	H
9	Robber's Gulch	B	4	M
10	Schoolhouse Peak	A	2	VH
11	Lyon's Ranch Trailhead	B	2	VH
14	Bald Hills Road at Coyote Peak Road	B	4	M

Redwood Creek Overlook

The view from this popular location is down toward Redwood Creek and across to a ridge beyond (Figure 3). There are few inconsistent elements except for the unnatural straight lines that remain from the clear cuts of previous logging operations and the view received a Scenic Quality rating of B (34.0). Colors are mostly a wide variety of greens and there are moderately bold landforms of hills and valleys. Redwood Creek can draw the attention of the viewer but only a small segment of the creek is visible and it is not a strong focal feature.

The overlook is identified in park brochures and maps and is used as a stop on field trips. The location has relatively high visitation for the Bald Hills area received an importance rating of 3 (30). Redwood Creek overlook is used for interpreting the logging industry as well as the restoration of logged forests and there is a moderate level of development at the site including a parking area, toilet, interpretive panels and a railing to control visitors.



Figure 3. View from Redwood Creek Overlook

Elk Camp Prairie

This provides an expansive view across prairie to Rogers Peak with old growth forest visible in the foreground and on the hills beyond (Figure 4). The view received a scenic quality rating of A (39.0). The color and form of the prairie create strong, pleasing contrast with the forest and the ocean is visible in the far background, though it is not a dominant feature. There are minimal visual intrusions including some old clear cut areas in on the hills beyond the prairie and a single house in the middleground that adds interest to the view.

This view is from an informal pullout area near a gravel pit along Bald Hills road and received an importance rating of 5(15). There are no interpretive services or management at the site and it is not identified on NPS or other brochures or maps. The stop has developed over time because there is space available to pull off of Bald Hills Road caused by use of the gravel pit. The location is not used for interpretation though the Bald Hills Road has historic significance and the landscape is part of the Lyons Ranch Historic District and the Bald Hills Archeological District.



Figure 4. View across Elk Camp Prairie

Dolason Prairie

The view from the trailhead parking area is across a small portion of prairie surrounded by forest with Rogers Peak in the distance beyond the hills in the middleground (Figure 5). The prairie contrasts in form and color with the forest and the view received a scenic quality rating of B (30.5). There are no inconsistent elements except for clear cuts from previous timber operations on the hills and there are no major focal points in the view.

The trailhead is publicized in NPS and outside media and the view received an importance rating of 3 (24). There are improvements to the site including a parking area, toilet and signage, though the site generally receives low visitation overall. The view is representative of Redwood's interpretive themes relating to timber operations and the Bald Hills prairie landscape.



Figure 5. View across Dolason Prairie from trailhead

Airstrip Prairie

This location provides a view from the prairie to the forested ridges and hills to the west with some prominent forested areas visible at the edge of the prairie to create a sense of boundary (Figure 6). The view lacks some of the bold forms of other views and received a Scenic Quality rating of B (33.5). There are no major focal points but the forested areas create interesting contrast of form and color with the prairie. The straight lines of clear cuts are prominent on the far ridges. Except for a fire lookout and the asphalt paving of Bald Hills Road there are few other visual intrusions that are not in character with the landscape.

Similar to several other viewpoints, this location is an informal stop along Bald Hills Road where visitors can get a view of the prairies and the lupines when in bloom. The view received an Importance rating of 4 (16). It is not a publicized viewpoint location and there is not a defined place to stop. There are no facilities and the level of visitation is not known but is anticipated to be low. The view represents some of the major interpretive themes of the Bald Hills are of the park, especially the historic ranching and traditional Native American landscape.



Figure 6. View of Airstrip Prairie

Top of Counts Hill

This view is across sloping prairie with forested hills and valleys beyond (Figure 7). Schoolhouse lookout can be seen in the distance and two unpaved segments of Bald Hills Road are prominent in the foreground and middleground and create good contrast at the edge of a forested area. The view received a Scenic Quality rating of B (36.5). Clear cuts on the hills beyond the prairie are the only visual distractions and they are not as prominent from this location as they are from other viewpoints.

This location is also not a designated stop and receives no publicity as a viewpoint. Since it is an informal stopping location visitation is expected to be low and the view received an Importance rating of 4 (18.0). Much of the view is comprised of the Bald Hills Archeological District and the Lyons Ranch Historic District that represent important interpretive themes of the Bald Hills area.



Figure 7. View from the top of Counts Hill

Maneze Landing

This location also offers a sweeping view across prairies to hills and valleys beyond but also has oak woodlands and rock outcrops in the foreground and middleground (Figure 8). The view received a Scenic Quality rating of B (37). The bold lines of the hills become a focus of the view and there are few inconsistent elements. Schoolhouse lookout is visible, but is too distant to be a distraction, and in some ways becomes an object of interest. Bald Hills Road stands out in the landscape from this location but the winding nature adds interest to the view as it seems to fit well in the landscape.

Much of the view is comprised of the Lyons Ranch Historic District, Bald Hills Archeological District as well as recognized Traditional Cultural Properties (TCP) associated with the Yurok and Chilula Native American communities. The view received an Importance rating of 4 (19.5). These landscapes represent important interpretive themes for the Bald Hills area of the park, though visitor use is low and as for other informal viewing locations, there is no publicity for the specific viewpoint. Schoolhouse lookout is also an important component, but as noted is not prominent at this distance.



Figure 8. View from Maneze Landing

Childs Hill

The view from this location received a Scenic Quality rating of A (39.5) because the grasslands and oak woodlands create interesting color and texture patterns in contrast to the dark green forested hills (Figure 9). Similar to other locations along Bald Hills Road the view is an expansive scene across the Bald Hills to forested hills and valleys but Rogers Peak prominent in the view to the west.

Schoolhouse Lookout is also visible but still somewhat distant. Bald Hills Road is a prominent visible element, but as noted for other viewpoints, the form, line, and color of the road seems to be in context with the landscape and it adds interest to the view.

Similar to Maneze Landing, much of the view is comprised of the Lyons Ranch Historic District, Bald Hills Archeological District and the Yrock and Chilula TCPs. The view received an Importance rating of 4 (20.5), with generally low visitation and no publicity for the location. Similar to other locations along Bald Hills Road, visitors are expected to be sensitive to potential changes in the view because they recognize the significance of the historic and cultural values of the landscape.



Figure 9. View from Child's Hill

Child's Hill at Judith's Gate

An expansive view from the prairies along Bald Hills Road to oak woodlands and forested hills, this view received a Scenic Quality rating of B (37.5) (Figure 10). Schoolhouse lookout is somewhat closer than it is from other viewpoints, though still adds interest to the view rather than becoming a visual intrusion. There is good contrast of forms and colors between the prairies, woodlands and forests and as at other locations Bald Hills Road is a prominent element that adds interest in form, line and color and seems in context with the landscape setting.

The view from this location is used on the cover of a park brochure and newsletter, but the location is not specifically identified in publicity material or shown on maps. The view received an Importance rating of 3 (23.5) as it is expected to have a higher level of visitation and viewers who seek out the viewpoint are likely to stay a bit longer and be sensitive to potential changes that could diminish the value of the view.



Figure 10. View of Child's Hill from Judith's Gate along Bald Hills Road

Robber's Gulch

Robber's Gulch offers an open view of prairies sloping to the west toward a forested valley and hills beyond (Figure 11). As at other locations the prairies, woodlands and forests create interesting contrast for forms, colors and textures and the view received a Scenic Quality rating of B (37.5). Bald Hills Road, noted for several viewpoints appears in context with the landscape and the curving lines add interest to the view.

The location of this viewpoint is not in brochures or formally publicized, but is well known as a location to view the lupines in bloom and is publicized regionally in multiple media and by the park for this purpose. The view received an Importance rating of 4 (21.0). Though a known and publicized viewing location there are no facilities or development at the viewpoint and the park provides no management. Unlike several other viewpoints along Bald Hills Road, Robber's Gulch does provide an opportunity to pull off of the road and take in an extended view though visitation still is likely very low and view duration somewhat short. In addition to its value as a wildflower viewing location the view is also comprised primarily of the cultural landscapes described previously that represent important interpretive themes for the Bald Hills area of the park.



Figure 11. View from Robber's Gulch Overlook

Schoolhouse Peak

The view from Schoolhouse Peak lookout is a view from an elevated location with extensive areas of the prairies along Bald Hills Road that extend to forested valleys and hills – including Rogers Peak – in the distance and finally extending to the ocean in the far background (Figure 12). The view received a Scenic Quality rating of A (42.5). The prairies and oak woodlands create interesting contrast with the forested areas and along with the ocean, Rogers Peak create multiple focal points in the view. An extensive length of Bald Hills Road is visible it is evident how the winding nature and low level of improvement to the road help in fit in the context of the landscape.

Schoolhouse Peak Lookout is publicized in NPS brochures and some outside media. The view received and Importance rating of 2 (31.5) as the level of visitation is generally higher than other locations along Bald Hills Road. The location is also used by outside groups for stargazing and possibly other uses. Because it is more of a destination than other viewpoints visitors likely stay longer at the site and would be potentially more sensitive to changes in the view that could diminish the existing character of the landscape. The park provides limited management that includes mowing grass areas near the tower and providing water to reduce fire risk.



Figure 12. View from School House Peak Lookout

Lyon's Ranch Trailhead

The view from the trailhead is similar to other views along Bald Hills Road with expansive rolling prairie and oak woodlands sloping toward a forested valley, in this case Coyote Creek basin and the heavily forested hills beyond (Figure 13). The view received a Scenic Quality rating of B (37.0). There is good contrast of color, form and texture between the, prairie, oak woodlands and evergreen forests while several highly visible clear cuts create strong contrasts of color and line that can be somewhat of a distraction in the view.

The trailhead is publicized in NPS and outside media and is included in the park's trail plan. The view received an Importance rating of 2 (33.5). There are limited facilities at the site including a gravel parking area and interpretive information about Lyon's Ranch. Much of the view is comprised of the cultural landscapes of the Lyon's Ranch Historic District, Bald Hills Archeological District and the Yurok/Chilula TCPs. This location has higher visitation than other viewpoints because of its destination as a trailhead and visitors generally stay longer as they are getting ready to leave or are returning from a hike or enjoying activities such as a picnic lunch. Most viewers are expected to be sensitive to changes in the landscape that could diminish the character of the setting as they are looking forward to a hike natural setting or to experience the cultural landscape associated with Native American tribes and historic ranching.



Figure 13. View from Lyon's Ranch Trailhead

Bald Hills Road at Coyote Peak Road

The location of this viewpoint on an elevated ridge offers a 360 degree view of the Bald Hills and the extensive prairies, woodlands and forests, both within and beyond the park boundaries (Figure 14). The view received a Scenic Quality rating of B (32.0) and as at other locations the prairies and oak woodlands create interesting contrast of form, color and texture with the surrounding forests. Schoolhouse Peak Lookout is visible as a somewhat prominent feature along with Bald Hills Road and the road leading to the peak. Because of their curving nature and small profile the roads seem to fit well in the landscape.

This viewpoint, similar to other informal locations lacks an identified pullout area or developed facilities. It is expected to have generally low levels of visitors who specifically come to this location. Visitors who do make it a point too stop at this location are expected to be sensitive to potential changes in the landscape that could diminish the visual character since they likely stopped to enjoy the expansive, natural landscape views in all directions. Much of the view also encompasses the cultural landscapes of the Lyon's Ranch Historic District, the Bald Hills Archeological District and the cultural landscapes associated with the Yurok and Chilula tribes.



Figure 14. View from Bald Hills Road and Coyote Peak Road intersection

Scenic Inventory Values

The Scenic Inventory Values (SIV) for the viewpoints inventoried range from Moderate to Very High (Table 2). While the overall level of visitation in the Bald Hills area is lower compared to other parts of the parks, the two locations with Very High SIV – Schoolhouse Peak and Lyon’s Ranch Trailhead – are identified in NPS and outside media and attract a higher level of visitation than other locations in the Bald Hills. Most other viewpoints are informal stops and are expected to have low visitation and overall lower Importance values. However all viewpoints inventoried generally have high scenic quality as they have few visual intrusions and also take in extensive views of the historic and cultural landscapes associated with the Bald Hills. The Bald Hills Road is an integral feature in many views and its curving design and small profile help it fit into the existing landscape rather than appear as a visual intrusion into the views.

4. Conclusions

The Bald Hills area of Redwood National and State Parks offers visitors a unique visual and cultural resource experience. The distinct landscape of rolling prairies and woodlands retains many of the characteristics that are associated with the history of the area. Bald Hills Road is a key component of three cultural resource areas that encompass much of the Bald Hills, the Bald Hills Archeological District, Lyons Ranches Rural Historic District, and the Bald Hills Ethnographic Landscape. Fourteen viewpoints were selected for this inventory effort to gain a better understanding of the scenic values in the Bald Hills. Four viewpoints, Redwood Creek Overlook, Dolason Prairie Trailhead, Schoolhouse Peak Lookout and Lyon's Ranch Trailhead are identified in NPS and outside media as locations for recreation, interpretation, or other activities. The remaining viewpoints that a more limited number of visitors experience are informal locations along Bald Hills Road that offer expansive views to the surrounding landscape. While these informal viewpoints are not widely recognized and lack development they offer visitors different perspectives of the historic and cultural landscapes. The current Bald Hills Road in its unpaved condition is an important part of helping visitors connect with the historic setting. Views from most locations are relatively free of major visual intrusions though evidence of clear cuts from past and current logging activities can be a distraction at some locations. The prairies and woodlands create interesting contrast with the heavily forested hills and valleys and distant views from some locations offer a glimpse of the ocean. Even though Scenic Quality ratings were mostly in the B category with three views rated as having a scenic quality rating of A; Elk Camp Prairie, Childs Hill and Schoolhouse Peak Lookout, the numeric scoring ranged from 30.5 to 42.5, indicated relative consistency of the aesthetic qualities of the views. Because of the wide range of level of visitation and development among the viewpoints, View importance ratings range from 2 (low) to 5(very high). The combination of the ratings at each viewpoint resulted in Scenic Inventory Values that ranged from Moderate to Very High indicating that the high scenery is a primary characteristic that enhances the visitor experience in the Bald Hills.

5. Literature Cited

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Appendix A: Scenic Quality and View Importance Rating Methods

Scenic Quality

Assessing scenic quality involves field-based assessments of: Landscape Character Integrity, Vividness and Visual Harmony.

Each component is assessed in the field while viewing the landscape from the viewpoint, and the assessments requires that the group evaluate three factors for each component. All factors are equally weighted.

Landscape Character Integrity

Scenic integrity indicates the degree of intactness and wholeness of the landscape character identified in the landscape description section. The highest scenic integrity ratings are given to those landscapes which have little or no deviation from the character valued for its aesthetic appeal.

The rating process assumes that in order to have the highest degree of integrity, i.e. a high quality example of the identified landscape character the view must:

- Have most or all of the key elements of landscape character present;
- Have elements that are of high quality and in the appropriate condition for the landscape character, i.e. well built, well cared for, or, for historic/rustic landscapes, appropriately worn/aged; and
- Be relatively free of elements that are inconsistent with the landscape character.

Vividness

Vividness is the degree to which landscape elements are distinctive or striking enough to make a view memorable. The rating assumes that to have a high degree of vividness, the view must:

- Contain one or more dominant visual features or focal points;
- Contain striking forms and/or lines; and
- Contain striking colors, textures, or visible motion.

Visual Harmony

Visual harmony is the extent to which there is a pleasing array of visual elements in a landscape, usually as a result of a sense of visual order, compatibility, and completeness between and among the land forms, water forms, vegetation, or built elements visible in the landscape. The approach assumes that a high degree of visual harmony is achieved when:

- There is a clearly recognizable structure, pattern, or order to the spatial relationships of the landscape elements;
- The landscape elements display pleasing scale relationships; and
- The landscape displays pleasing color relationships.

Scenic quality ratings fall into five classes from A to E. Class A views have the highest scenic quality and Class E the lowest.

Importance Values

The view importance rating identifies NPS and visitor values for the viewpoint, the viewed landscape and the viewers. The view importance rating is an office-based exercise. Each component is assessed by a team of NPS staff. In the same manner as Scenic Quality, the process requires that the group evaluate three factors for each component and all factors are equally weighted.

Viewpoint Importance

Viewpoint importance assesses the extent to which the viewpoint is publicized and managed for visitors. The rating system assumes that to have the highest importance rating the viewpoint must:

- Be extensively publicized, especially for its scenic views, in NPS or external communications and media (e.g. hiking guides, web sites, movies).
- Have facilities that have been added or are planned for the viewpoint area to enhance the visitor experience and;
- Have a high level of interpretive services that contribute to the visitors' enjoyment of scenic, historical, cultural scientific or other NPS values of the unit.

Viewed Landscape Importance

Viewed landscape importance assesses the extent to which the elements in the viewed landscape are publicized and used for interpretation. The assessment also evaluates how important special designations such as Wilderness or historic sites are within the view. The viewed rating system assumes that to have the highest level of importance the viewed landscape must:

- Be extensively publicized, especially for its scenic views, in NPS or in external communications or media (e.g. hiking guides, web sites).
- Consist of all or mostly specially designated areas, or nationally/regionally significant scenic, historic, cultural, or scientific features or landmarks (e.g. wilderness areas, cultural landscapes).
- Strongly illustrate the NPS unit's scenic character or important interpretive themes and/or be connected to the unit's goal for visitor experience

Viewer Concern

The evaluation of viewer concern relies primarily on the knowledge and professional judgment of NPS staff, and the rating system assumes that to have the highest level of viewer concern:

- The viewpoint must have a high level of visitation in relation to other viewpoints in the park;
- Viewers generally spend an extended period of time at the viewpoint; and
- Most visitors would be unusually sensitive to potential changes in a view because they are seeking views of natural character or historic significance.

View importance ratings fall into five classes from 1 to 5. Class 1 views have the highest view importance and Class 5 the lowest.

Appendix B: View Panoramas



Redwood Creek Overlook; View Direction: West Approximate Width of View: 160 degrees



Elk Camp Prairie; View Direction; Southwest Approximate Width of View: 170 degrees



Dolason Prairie; View Direction: Southwest Approximate Width of View: 130 degrees



Airstrip Prairie; View Direction: Southwest; Approximate Width of View: 135 degrees



Counts Hill; View Direction: Southwest; Approximate Width of View: 190 degrees



Maneze Landing; View Direction: South; Approximate Width of View: 205 degrees



Childs Hill; View Direction: South; Approximate Width of View: 200 degrees



Childs Hill at Judith's Gate; View Direction: Southeast; Approximate Width of View: 112 degrees



Robber's Gulch; View Direction: West; Approximate Width of View: 162 degrees



Schoolhouse Peak; View Direction: South; Approximate Width of View: 220 degrees



Lyon's Peak Trailhead; View Direction: Southeast; Approximate Width of View: 160 degrees



Bald Hills Road at Coyote Creek Road; View Direction: N/A; Approximate Width of View: 360 degrees

The Department of the Interior protects and manages the nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provides scientific and other information about those resources; and honors its special responsibilities to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated Island Communities.

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National Park Service
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