

Screening Form
Low-Effect Incidental Take Permit
Determination and National Environmental
Policy Act (NEPA) Environmental Action
Statement

I. HCP Information

A. HCP Name: Low-Effect Habitat Conservation Plan for the Verizon Wireless Telecommunications Facility Expansion Project Felton, Santa Cruz County, California.

B. Affected Species: Federally endangered Mount Hermon June beetle (*Polyphylla barbata*), Zayante band-winged grasshopper (*Trimerotropis infantilis*), and Ben Lomond spineflower (*Chorizanthe pungens* var. *hartwegiana*).

C. HCP Size (in stream miles and/or acres): Expansion of an existing telecommunications facility is proposed on a 28-acre parcel (APN: 061-371-16) which would disturb a total of 886 square feet (0.020 acre) of open soil.

D. Brief Project Description (including minimization and mitigation plans):

Verizon Wireless is seeking an incidental take permit, under Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Federal Endangered Species Act. A 3-year permit term is requested to cover take of the federally endangered Mount Hermon June beetle (*Polyphylla barbata*) and Zayante band-winged grasshopper (*Trimerotropis infantilis*). The HCP also addresses effects to the federally endangered Ben Lomond spineflower (*Chorizanthe pungens* var. *hartwegiana*) that would result from expansion of an existing telecommunications facility to support new equipment cabinets and a generator to power new antennas, which would be installed on an existing monopole. The new equipment is needed to supply cellular service to Verizon Wireless's customers.

The project site is located within an existing utility easement area in the northern portion of the County of Santa Cruz's 28-acre parcel located at 3650 Graham Hill Road between the City of Scotts Valley and Felton, an unincorporated area within the County of Santa Cruz in central coastal California (APN: 061-371-16). The expanded facility would be southeast of and immediate adjacent to the existing facility. The total project area, which includes the area that would be disturbed during construction as well as the access and staging areas, is 2,986 square feet (sq ft) (0.069 acre).

Approximately 886 sq ft (0.020 acre) of open soil within the project area provides suitable breeding habitat for the Mount Hermon June beetle and dispersal habitat for the Zayante band-winged grasshopper. Ben Lomond spineflower was not observed aboveground during the survey but may occur as dormant seed in the soil. Of the 886

sq ft (0.020 acre) of open soil in the project area, 615 sq ft (0.014 acre) would be permanently removed by the project. An additional 271 sq ft (0.006 acre) would be temporarily impacted. This area of temporary habitat disturbance will be restored following construction.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Avoid and minimize impacts to the Mount Hermon June beetle, Zayante band-winged grasshopper, and Ben Lomond spineflower within the project site.

Objective 1.1: Collect seed of Ben Lomond spineflower plants within the project disturbance area and use collected seed to restore the affected area post-project.

Objective 1.2: Install new telecommunications equipment on a platform elevated above the soil surface, to enable Mount Hermon June beetles to emerge from the soil.

Objective 1.3: Monitor construction activities to: 1) capture and relocate Mount Hermon June beetles observed during construction to intact habitat away from the construction activities, and 2) to herd out of harm's way any Zayante band-winged grasshoppers observed in the project disturbance envelope.

Objective 1.4: Minimize removal of native Sandhills plant species.

Objective 1.5: Avoid landscaping with turf grass, weed matting, aggregate, and mulch.

Objective 1.6: Avoid installing new night lighting which would disrupt Mount Hermon June beetle breeding during the flight season.

Goal 2: Restore habitat within the 0.006-acre area of temporary disturbance around the expanded telecommunications facility, to re-establish native plants including Ben Lomond spineflower, and restore habitat for the Mount Hermon June beetle and Zayante band-winged grasshopper.

Objective 2.1: Develop and implement a plan to restore habitat in the 0.006-acre area of temporary impact, by controlling erosion and establishing native plants from site-collected propagules, including the Ben Lomond spineflower and Ben Lomond buckwheat salvaged from the impact area prior to project implementation, and host plants for the Mount Hermon June beetle and Zayante band-winged grasshopper.

Goal 3: Protect and manage habitat for the Mount Hermon June beetle and Zayante band-winged grasshopper at an off-site location of high long-term conservation value to the species.

Objective 3.1: Purchase 2,731 sq ft (0.063 acre) of conservation credits for the endangered insects at the Zayante Sandhills Conservation Bank, or other Service-approved conservation bank providing credits for the listed insects.

The HCP's conservation strategy includes the following measures designed to avoid and minimize the proposed project's impacts on the Mount Hermon June beetle, Zayante band-winged grasshopper, and Ben Lomond spineflower.

1. The new equipment will be mounted to an elevated platform, as opposed to a concrete pad, to facilitate emergence of Mount Hermon June beetles and reduce impacts associated with grading.
2. Prior to construction, a qualified biologist will collect seed of Ben Lomond spineflower from within the project impact area, for use in restoration of the temporarily impacted area.
3. The project will be conducted outside of the adult activity period for the Mount Hermon June beetle (May-August) and Zayante band-winged grasshopper (June-October), if at all possible. If soil-disturbing activities occur during the Mount Hermon June beetle flight season, tarps will be used to cover exposed soil, in order to prevent dispersing male beetles from burrowing into the construction site.
4. A qualified biologist will be on site during all ground-disturbing activities, to capture any Mount Hermon June beetle observed in the construction area and relocate them outside to intact sandhills habitat that supports appropriate soils and vegetation. The biologist will also herd out of harm's way and Zayante band-winged grasshoppers observed in the project area.
5. The project will not entail installation of outdoor lights, which can disrupt the behavior of nocturnal insects including Mount Hermon June beetle.
6. Landscaping elements that degrade habitat for the three covered species, including weed matting, landscape rock, and turf grass, will be avoided.
7. Following completion of the project, Verizon Wireless will restore the 271-sq ft (0.006-acre) area of temporary habitat impacts. The plan will include measures to limit soil erosion, sowing seed of native plant species collected on site, and planting native plants from site-collected propagules.

To mitigate for the unavoidable impacts to the listed species, Verizon Wireless will purchase 0.063 acre of conservation credits to mitigate the project's impacts to Mount Hermon June beetle and Zayante band-winged grasshopper habitat.

Verizon Wireless commits to fund all elements of the plan's conservation strategy including purchase of the conservation credits, which will occur prior to implementation of any covered activities. A qualified biologist will conduct monitoring to ensure compliance with the conservation strategy, and to evaluate success toward the biological goals and objectives. Monitoring results will be provided to the USFWS in a project report provided by January 31 following each year that the permit is active.

II. Does the HCP fit the following Department of Interior and Fish and Wildlife Service categorical-exclusion criteria?

A. Are the effects of the HCP minor or negligible on federally listed, proposed, or candidate species and their habitats covered under the HCP?

Yes, the effects of the project on the Mount Hermon June beetle, Zayante band-winged grasshopper, and Ben Lomond spineflower, are both minor and negligible. This conclusion is based on the following:

1. The small size of disturbance caused by the project: The project would disturb only 0.020 acre of sandhills habitat, which has been degraded by prior land use activities. Indirect effects will be limited by minimization measures incorporated in the plan's conservation strategy.
2. The degraded condition of habitat within project area: Habitat that would be impacted by this project has been previously degraded by historical use of the property for utilities (water infrastructure and telecommunications). Due to its location within habitat that is periodically impacted from maintenance activities, project implementation is anticipated to have minor impacts on the biological function of the Zayante Sandhills. Therefore, the proposed project is not expected to affect species persistence or recovery.

B. Are the effects of the HCP minor or negligible on all other components of the human environment, including environmental values and environmental resources (e.g. air quality, geology and soils, water quality and quantity, socio-economic, cultural resources, recreation, visual resources, environmental justice, etc.), after implementation of the minimization and mitigation measures?

Yes, due to the small size of the proposed project and project implementation resulting in no changes to the current land use, we expect effects on other environmental values and resources will be minor or negligible. Effects of noise on the environment are expected to be negligible. The proposed project would not cause socio-economic impacts. Impacts to visual and cultural resources are not anticipated. The proposed project would not cause socio-economic impacts.

C. Would the incremental impacts of this HCP, considered together with the impacts of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions (regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions) *not* result, over time, in a cumulative effects to the human environment (the natural and physical environment) which would be considered significant?

Yes, we do not expect significant cumulative effects on the Mount Hermon June beetle, Zayante band-winged grasshopper, Ben Lomond spineflower or other species or communities of the Zayante Sandhills in the foreseeable future. The County of Santa Cruz Sensitive Habitat Ordinance limits development on parcels located within the Sandhills. The proposed project would occur in an existing, developed area and would not induce further development. Therefore, the project would not result in significant cumulative effects to environmental values or resources.

III. Do any of the exceptions to categorical exclusions (extraordinary

circumstances) listed in 43 CFR 46.215 apply to this HCP?

Would implementation of the HCP:

A. Have significant impacts on public health or safety?

No. The HCP was developed to cover legal activities on a legal parcel that is currently used for similar activities. The expanded telecommunications facility would be constructed following the California Building Code, and would not involve the use of hazardous materials, substances, or waste.

B. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as: historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990) or floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds, eagles, or other ecologically significant or critical resources?

No. The project area does not support unique geographic characteristics such as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands; floodplains; national monuments; migratory bird resources, or other ecologically significant or critical areas.

C. Have highly controversial environmental effects (defined at 43 CFR 46.30), or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [see NEPA section 102(2)(E)]?

No. The project is consistent with County of Santa Cruz zoning laws, ordinances, regulations and policies, and is consistent with current existing land uses. No significant environmental effects or controversy are anticipated.

D. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects, or involve unique or unknown environmental risks?

No. The proposed project includes only the minor expansion of an existing telecommunications facility; it lacks uncertain effects or unknown risks.

E. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?

No. As discussed, the proposed project is limited in size and scope and located in a developed area. This HCP does not establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions that will potentially cause significant environmental effects.

F. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects?

No. The proposed project is a single action not related to any other. We are not aware of any future actions directly related to the HCP; therefore, significant cumulative effects are not anticipated.

G. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places?

No. A search of the National Register of Historic Places (<http://nrhp.focus.nps.gov/>) revealed no sites listed or eligible for listing within the project area or elsewhere in central Santa Cruz County.

H. Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species?

No. This project would result in soil disturbance to only a 0.020 acre area known to be occupied by the covered species. Disturbance of this small area of habitat is anticipated to have a negligible effect on the long-term persistence of the covered species in the area and recovery of the species overall. Negligible effects to Zayante band-winged critical habitat is anticipated.

I. Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law, or a requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

No. The HCP and incidental take permit issuance will fulfill Federal environmental compliance. This project is subject to California Environmental Quality Act review pursuant to the County of Santa Cruz implementing guidelines and other Federal, State, and local environmental laws and requirements. Tribal lands would not be affected.

J. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).

No. The proposed project would have no effect on low income or minority populations.

K. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).

No. Ceremonial or sacred sites do not occur on the proposed project site and would not be affected by implementation of the HCP.

L. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).

No. Disturbed areas within the project site would be restored with native Sandhills plants as a component of the HCP.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT

Within the spirit and intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established the following administrative record.

Based on the information and analysis above, I determine that the proposed Incidental Take Permit for the Verizon Wireless Telecommunications Facility Expansion Project qualifies for a categorical exclusion, as defined in 40 CFR 1508.4 and in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service *Habitat Conservation Planning Handbook*. Furthermore, no extraordinary circumstances identified in 43 CFR 46.215 exist for the Verizon Wireless Telecommunications Facility Expansion Project. Therefore, the Service's permit action for Verizon Wireless Telecommunications Facility Expansion Project is categorically excluded from further NEPA review and documentation, as provided by 40 CFR 1507.3; 43 CFR 46.205; 43 CFR 46.215; 516 DM 3; 516 DM 8.5; and 550 FW 3.3C. A more extensive NEPA process is unwarranted, and no further NEPA documentation will be made.

Other supporting documents:

Low-Effect Habitat Conservation Plan for the Verizon Wireless Telecommunications Facility Expansion Project, Felton, Santa Cruz County, California.

Signature Approval:

Stephen P. Henry
Field Supervisor
Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office

Date