



## Introduction

Natural vegetation provides habitat for wildlife, scenery for people, and soil stabilization. Vegetation may also hold cultural value and helps provide a buffer between competing land uses. Wildlife species rely on vegetation and habitat resources for survival and to assist in migration. Wildlife also bring commercial, recreational, and tribal assets to the community by providing resources for hunters and fishermen as well as birders and nature enthusiasts. This fact sheet summarizes the potential impacts the proposed project would have on vegetation and terrestrial wildlife.

## What was studied?

The analysis considered the potential impacts of construction and operations on existing vegetation communities, general wildlife species and habitat, and special-status species (i.e., threatened or endangered species).

## What was the study area?

- Proposed project site
- Proposed wetland mitigation site
- Lands within about 1,000 feet of these sites (see Figures 3.6-1 and 3.6-2 of the draft EIS)
- Rail corridor (Anacortes Subdivision) and lands within a quarter mile of the rail line

See the Proposed Project Fact Sheet for a map of the site.

## How were impacts analyzed?

Several documents and data were reviewed to provide a description of the extent and condition of existing vegetation communities and wildlife habitat. This review also looked at the presence of special-status plants and terrestrial wildlife species, and potential suitable terrestrial habitat. A site visit was also conducted to review existing conditions.

Impacts were calculated using temporary and permanent boundaries of both the proposed project and wetland mitigation sites. The analysis used the results from the noise study (see Chapter 3.9 - Noise and Vibration of the draft EIS for additional detail) to evaluate potential noise impacts associated with construction and operations at the project site on key wildlife species.

## What are the potential impacts?

### Construction Impacts – Vegetation

Removal of vegetation would be required to construct the project. The overall permanent impacts of construction on vegetation are not anticipated to be significant because the primary impacts to pasture vegetation are small-scale in the context of the larger contributing Telegraph Slough-Padilla Bay watershed, which is predominantly agriculture. Forest stands that would be permanently affected comprise a fraction of forest stands identified in the study area.

Construction of the wetland mitigation site would require removal of vegetation. However, in accordance with the wetland mitigation plan, nearshore ecosystem processes would be reestablished and are anticipated to develop into nearshore habitats over time (mudflats, salt marshes, tidal channels, and upland transition zones).

### Construction Impacts – Terrestrial Wildlife

Construction of the proposed project and wetland mitigation sites would temporarily disturb and permanently alter wildlife habitat in some vegetation communities. Construction-related water quality impacts may alter foraging opportunities for waterfowl and other aquatic birds because of disturbances to sediments during in-water work. Impacts might include water clouding, which could obscure prey for waterfowl and other aquatic birds. Noise and light associated with construction activities could cause stress to wildlife and alter behavior patterns.

Construction would not directly alter marbled murrelet habitat; however, marbled murrelets could be disturbed by construction activities. Construction would permanently remove two active bald eagle nests: one near the rail corridor (Anacortes Subdivision) in the southern portion of the proposed project site, and a second within the wetland mitigation site. A third bald eagle nest near the proposed project site would be retained. Because other special-status species or habitats are not known to occur on the project or wetland mitigation sites, it is unlikely that construction would directly affect these species or their habitat.

### Operation Impacts – Vegetation

Operation of the rail unloading facility is not anticipated to disturb vegetation communities. Creation of the wetland mitigation site would increase the extent, connectivity, and integrity of native vegetation communities and land cover in the watershed.

## Operation Impacts – Terrestrial Wildlife

Operation of the rail unloading facility may result in direct, long-term disturbance to wildlife. Such impacts could include increased degradation of habitat quality, increased collisions between trains and animals, light and glare impacts, disruption of species' social structures, avoidance or abandonment of previously occupied areas adjacent to the facility, and obstructions to wildlife movement.

Operational noise from the project may result in wildlife avoidance in the immediate vicinity; however, this impact is anticipated to be negligible, given the current noise levels from existing operations at the Shell Puget Sound Refinery site and other surrounding development.

Operation of the proposed project has the potential to affect behavior of bald eagles at the retained nest near the proposed project site and may also affect behavior of great blue herons at the March Point Heronry.

## Cumulative Impacts

Within the study area, there has been significant agricultural, industrial, commercial, and residential development. It is assumed that with this growth and construction, vegetation and terrestrial wildlife have been affected. In addition, construction and operation of the proposed Tesoro Clean Products Upgrade Project has the potential to impact vegetation and terrestrial wildlife. The Tesoro project and the proposed project could have cumulative impacts on vegetation and terrestrial wildlife. These impacts would be minimized by construction best management practices (BMPs) and localized to the Tesoro Refinery site and the proposed project and wetland mitigation sites.

## What mitigation measures are proposed?

### Avoidance and Minimization

Impacts to vegetation and terrestrial wildlife would be minimized by implementation of the BMPs required as part of various permitting processes.

For example, BMPs could include confining construction activities to daylight hours to minimize potential light and noise impacts to wildlife, implementing stormwater and erosion control measures, and restoring all temporarily disturbed areas by replanting native vegetation.

In addition, Shell has incorporated engineering and operational measures into the design of the proposed project to avoid and minimize vegetation and terrestrial wildlife impacts.

## Mitigation

Construction of the proposed project would permanently remove two active bald eagle nests: one near the Anacortes Subdivision in the southern portion of the proposed project site, and a second within the wetland mitigation site. In accordance with the conditions of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) bald eagle take permit, Shell would mitigate for the loss of the bald eagle nests through design and development of four new bald eagle nesting platforms, two at least 400 feet from the new rail unloading facility, and two within the wetland mitigation site. These platforms are expected to maintain or increase overall nesting opportunities on the project site and wetland mitigation site. One existing bald eagle nest on the project site would be retained. Pursuant to the permit conditions, Shell would monitor the nest for eagle use during critical months and report activity to USFWS.

## Are there unavoidable significant adverse impacts?

If mitigation is implemented as proposed there would be no unavoidable significant adverse impacts to vegetation and terrestrial wildlife.

### PERMITS REQUIRED

- Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification
- Clean Water Act Section 404 Individual Permit
- Hydraulic Project Approval
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Construction Stormwater Permit
- Shoreline Substantial Development Permit
- Skagit County Grading Permit

### WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS TOPIC?

Chapter 3.6 – Vegetation and Terrestrial Wildlife of the draft EIS

The information in this fact sheet summarizes content from the draft Environmental Impact Statement; please review the full document for more detailed and complete information.

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