



**Blue Lake Rancheria
Wetland Program Plan**

Blue Lake Rancheria Approval Page

This Wetland Program Plan has been reviewed by the Blue Lake Rancheria's Tribal Council
and is hereby approved:



Claudia Brundin, Tribal Chairperson

3/2/2015

Date

Introduction

This Wetland Program Plan (WPP) has been prepared to describe a clear action plan for the next five years in how the Blue Lake Rancheria will work to protect the wetlands on tribal lands. The Blue Lake Rancheria consists of roughly 100 acres (74 acres in trust status, 22 acres in process of fee-to-trust transfer with BIA, and 3 acres in fee status) in Humboldt County, northwestern California (Figure 1). The Blue Lake Rancheria is situated along the north bank of the Mad River, with a portion of the Rancheria crossing the river. The Mad River watershed is home to listed aquatic species: coho salmon, Chinook salmon, Steelhead Trout, Pacific Eulachon, as well as Pacific Lamprey a “species of concern” and of cultural significance to area tribes.

The Blue Lake Rancheria has riparian and depressional wetlands that prior to beginning this work had no assessment as to their extent and health or quality (Figure 2). These wetlands support important ecological functions and provide habitat for threatened species, as well as support the cultural well-being of the Tribe.

Background Information

Tribal History

The Blue Lake Rancheria consists of approximately 95 acres near the City of Blue Lake, California (see Figure 1). There are 53 members of the Blue Lake Rancheria, and 22 homes on Rancheria lands.

The BLR is located within the ancestral territory of the Wiyot people. The Wiyot traditionally lived along the Eel and Mad Rivers, and Humboldt Bay, in Northern California. During the 1850s the Wiyot were forced out of their traditional territory and killed in large numbers by Euro-American settlers. In 1908, the BLR was established under the Rancheria Act as a refuge for homeless Indians. Here the members of the Tribe resided until August 18, 1958, when the original Rancheria was unlawfully terminated pursuant to P.L. 85-671. In 1983 the Rancheria secured title to a portion of its former trust land after a 25-year fight for re-establishment and as a result of the *Tillie Hardwick v. United States* decision.

In 1997 the BLR formed its Environmental Programs Department. The early years involved general program development, establishing environmental ordinances, and seeking out grant funding. As the program matured projects were developed around air quality and water quality monitoring. Department staff received direction from Tribal Council on the importance of restoring watershed health. A non-point source pollution assessment and management plan was developed in 2005, and a small wetland restoration project took place in two phases in 2009-2011. This Wetland Program Plan is a logical next step in protecting and enhancing these important habitats.

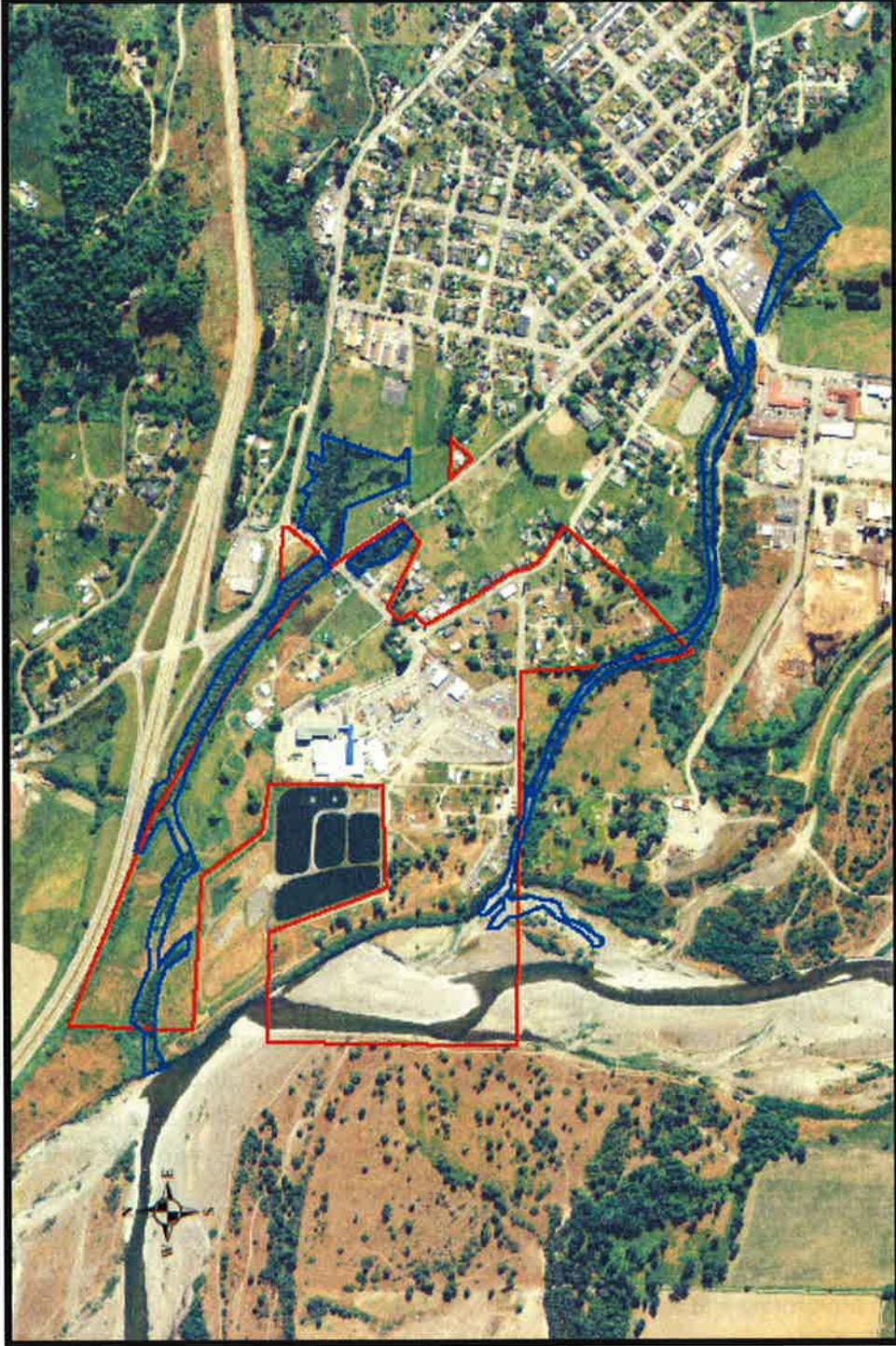
Wetland Significance

Wetlands are very biologically productive ecosystems and are important for many reasons. They provide water filtration and nutrient cycling for improved water quality. Wetlands provide habitat for many species' various life stages. Wetlands store floodwaters and minimize damages from flood events.

In addition to the multitude of ecological benefits that wetlands provide, there are recreational, aesthetic, and cultural values provided by wetlands. Fishing, birdwatching, hunting, photography, painting, and other recreational outdoor activities can be very wetland-centric. The Blue Lake Rancheria is located on the banks and floodplain of the Mad River. Tribal members and leadership have stressed the importance of watershed stewardship and restoration, as the health of the ecosystem is tied to the health of the people.

Over 90% of wetland acreage was thought to be lost in California between 1780-1980¹. It is critical to maintain and enhance what wetland habitat is remaining.

¹ From EPA's *Threats to Wetlands* outreach flier. Original source: *Wetlands*, 2nd edition, Van Nostrand and Reinholdt, 1993.



**Blue Lake Rancheria
 Wetland Boundary Extent**



Project Goals

The Blue Lake Rancheria is developing a Wetland Program Plan with the goals of protecting and restoring wetland resources for the benefit of human health and the environment. Over the next four years (2015-2019), the Blue Lake Rancheria will implement the Wetland Program Plan described below as funding levels allow. Specifically, the BLR has chosen actions to document & track changes in wetland conditions and size; increase wetlands acreage and/or quality; and provide protection for these important resources. Throughout these actions, we will provide education and outreach to build awareness and support. We will coordinate with relevant resource agencies and identify potential partners for projects to leverage resources and maintain support.

Actions & Activities to Achieve Goals

- (1) *Project:* Monitor wetland resources (map & CRAM) to monitor gains/losses in habitat as well as health or quality of wetland resources.
Activities: Following an approved wetland monitoring QAPP (approved 8/4/2014), we will roughly map the extent of the wetland using aerial imagery and ground-truthing with high-accuracy GPS. We will use the California Rapid Assessment Methodology (CRAM) to assess the health or quality of the wetlands on the Blue Lake Rancheria.
Core Element: Monitoring and Assessment
Timeline: all years (funding dependent)

- (2) *Project:* Write wetland protection ordinance for Tribal Council's approval
Activities: Work with legal assistance to write an ordinance protecting wetlands on the Blue Lake Rancheria. The ordinance will specify buffer requirements based on existing and approved ordinances elsewhere, as well as best management practices to be implemented for projects in the vicinity of wetlands to minimize any disturbance.
Core Element: Voluntary Restoration and Protection
Timeline: 2015

- (3) *Project:* Synthesize/analyze monitoring data
Activities: Each year's monitoring data will be used to track wetland conditions and update the Wetland Program Plan as necessary. The CRAM data will be input into an Excel spreadsheet to compare multiple years of data. If we have the time and funding, we will be able to compare the polygon sizes for multiple years' mapping data in GIS. Analyzing multiple years' data will give us an idea of trends in both amount of wetland habitat, and quality or health of that habitat so that we can make recommendations to Tribal Council on potential policy changes and/or update our QAPP to collect more or different data.
Core Element: Monitoring and Assessment
Timeline: 2015-2018

- (4) *Project:* Develop geographically-defined Wetland Management, Protection, and Restoration Plans (prioritize restoration projects)
Activities: Compile funding opportunity matrix and compare to CRAM scores and project sizes to prioritize projects and streamline funding applications.
Core Element: Voluntary Restoration and Protection
Timeline: 2018
- (5) *Project:* Ongoing Public Education and Outreach, brochures with monitoring data summarized, website development
Activities: Depending on the projects/activities completed for the year, we will undertake appropriate outreach. This could be a blurb about wetlands in an Earth Day brochure or in our annual Water Quality report, or a full write-up on wetland data either in a brochure or on our website. The goal would be to help disseminate information on general wetland importance as well as work the Blue Lake Rancheria has done around this topic.
Core Element: Education and Outreach
Timeline: 2015-2018
- (6) *Project:* Develop new Wetland Program Plan for next 5-year period
Activities: Write a Wetland Program Plan for 2019-2023 with approval of EPA Project Officer and Tribal Council.
Core Element: Monitoring and Assessment
Timeline: 2019

