

ConocoPhillips Company
Proposed Eastern Hills 4-65 17-18 South Well Pad & Access Road
Niobrara Project Area
Wildlife Assessment
September 4, 2019

INTRODUCTION

ConocoPhillips Company (COP) is developing oil and gas resources within Arapahoe County, Colorado. HWA Wildlife Consulting, LLC (HWA) conducted a desktop wildlife impact assessment for wildlife species of management concern to the Bureau of Land Management-Royal Gorge Field Office (BLM-RGFO) and Colorado Parks and Wildlife within and around the proposed Eastern Hills 4-65 17-18 South well pad and access road during 2019 (Figure 1).

PROJECT AREA

The proposed development is located approximately 4.7 miles southwest of Watkins, Colorado, in Section 17 T4N:R65W (Figure 1). Surface ownership is private and land use is primarily farming and agriculture around the site. The proposed Eastern Hills 4-65 17-18 South well pad is approximately 11 acres in size and the proposed access road is approximately 1,419 feet. The well pad is located in undisturbed short-grass prairie habitat that is encroached by non-native grasses and weed species.

METHODS

All spatial data described in this report were recorded in Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) coordinates using NAD 83 Zone 13N datum. ArcGIS® 10.5 software was used to generate maps and conduct spatial analyses, and field spatial data was recorded using Juniper Mesa2® handheld tablet computers/GPS receivers installed with ArcPad® 10.2 mobile Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software. Features visible from National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP) imagery, such as prairie dog colonies, were heads-up digitized from the most recent imagery.

RESULTS

Raptor Nests

No raptor nests are known to occur in the vicinity of the proposed development. The closest available raptor nesting habitat would be the cottonwood trees along Coal Creek, >0.38 miles from the well pad, to the south, southwest, and west. Burrowing owl nests are possible in the general area but no nests have been documented.

Black-tailed Prairie Dog

Based on aerial imagery, three black-tailed prairie dog colonies appear to be located within 0.25 miles of the proposed development, mainly located on the opposite side (east) of County Road 81 (Figure 1). One small colony is located approximately 250 feet north of the well pad. The access road would bisect the small colony (Figure 1).

Swift Fox Dens

Swift fox occurrence in the vicinity of the well pad location is unlikely given the low quality habitat, however the potential for den locations would seem higher on the east side of County Road 81 where prairie dogs appear to be more abundant, assuming the colonies are still occupied (Figure 1). No swift fox dens are known to occur in or within 0.25 miles of the proposed development.

DISCUSSION

The potential for impacts related to the development of the well pad and access road is expected to be minimal. Actual surface disturbance was limited to relatively low quality short-grass prairie. The proposed project is within 1 mile of potential nesting habitat for raptors, including cottonwood trees along Coal Creek and prairie dog colonies for burrowing owls. However, no known raptor nests are known to occur within 0.5 miles of the proposed well pad, which is the maximum spatial and/or temporal protective buffer distance recommended by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) for the protection of raptor nests, including bald eagles (CDOW 2008). Lastly swift fox dens are possible in the general vicinity of the well pad but unlikely given the limited extent and quality of native habitat. According to CPW, swift fox occupancy typically requires relatively large tracts of native prairie habitat either surrounding or directly adjacent to den locations (CPW 2012). When dens are present, CPW recommends spatial and seasonal protective buffers of 0.25 miles around breeding den locations from March 15 through June 15, respectively. Therefore development after June 15 is believed to sufficiently mitigate the potential impacts to swift fox breeding. No other federal or state listed rare or sensitive wildlife species are likely to occur in the area of proposed development.

REFERENCES CITED

- Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW; *currently Colorado Parks and Wildlife*). 2008. Recommended buffer zones and seasonal restrictions for Colorado raptors. Revised February 2008.
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). 2012. Monitoring swift fox using remote cameras in eastern Colorado. March 2012. 31pp.

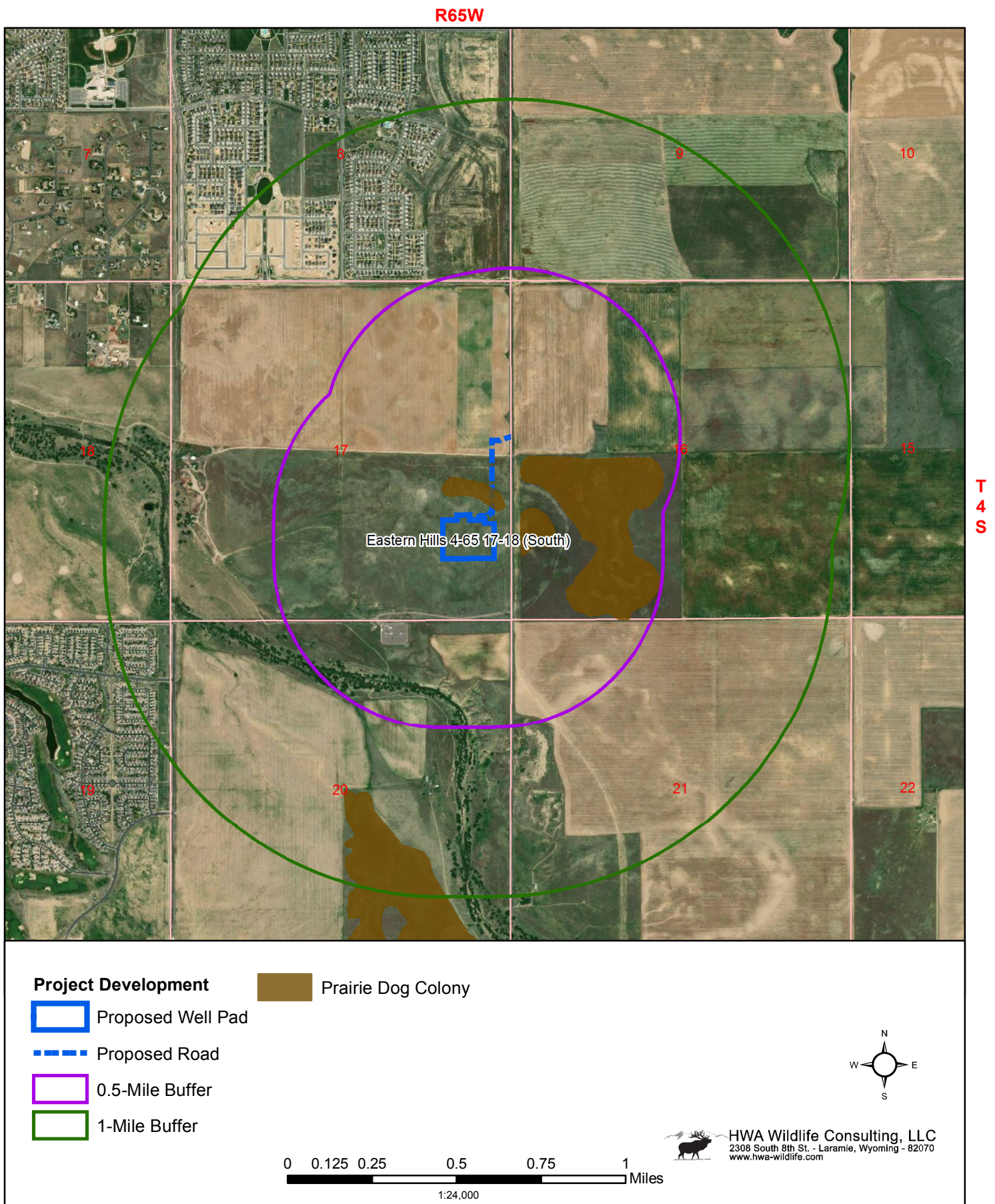


Figure 1. Known wildlife resources relative to the Eastern Hills 4-65 17-18 (South) well pad and access road, in Arapahoe County, Colorado.