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State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
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December 29, 2025

Steve Lazar
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SUBJECT: SoHum Ranch, LLC – Cannabis Farm and Farmstay (SCH# 2025110669, CEQA # CEQA-2021-0233-0000-R1)

Dear Steve Lazar:

On November 17, 2025, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received Humboldt County's (County; Lead Agency) Initial Study and Draft Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the SoHum Ranch, LLC – Cannabis Farm and Farmstay APN 217-252-002 (Project). CDFW appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback and understands the Lead Agency will accept comments through January 6, 2026.

As the Trustee Agency for the State's fish and wildlife resources, CDFW has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and the habitat necessary to sustain their populations (Fish & G. Code, §§ 1801 & 1802). As a Responsible Agency, CDFW administers the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) and other provisions of the Fish and Game Code that conserve the State's fish and wildlife public trust resources. CDFW offers the following comments and recommendations in our role as Trustee and Responsible Agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA; Pub. Resources Code, §21000 et seq.). These comments are intended to minimize Project impacts on public trust resources.

Project Description and Location

The Project entails development and operation of a commercial cannabis farm and farm stay on a 71-acre property (APN 217-252-002) north of Blocksburg, in Humboldt County, California. Project components include a variety of structures for cannabis cultivation, processing, distribution, and sale, as well as accommodations for employees and guests. A total of 42,000 square feet (sq. ft.) of canopy is proposed to be cultivated, with 32,000 sq. ft. of mixed-light cultivation in greenhouses and 10,000 sq. ft. of outdoor cultivation. One hundred

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percent of the power used will be provided by new on-site photovoltaic systems. Irrigation will primarily occur using rainwater captured and stored during the winter months. The Project also proposes installing two onsite wells, a 1.5-million-gallon pond, and 510,000 gallons in hard storage tanks. Other proposed development includes construction of two primary residences, a detached garage, and four (4) additional residential structures for up to eleven (11) full-time employees. A variety of facilities providing amenities are also proposed and include a multi-sport court, gym, volleyball court, pool and poolhouse, art museum, and observation deck. Though not proposed at this time, a secondary phase involves developing guest accommodations on the property into a larger wellness retreat/resort/spa operated in tandem with the commercial cannabis activities (Eco-Cannabis Wellness Retreat). Planned elements include a restaurant as well as a series of approximately 11 separate lodging units (casitas) for guests. This future phase of the project is dependent on forthcoming amendments to the county zoning code addressing glamping and resort-type uses in agricultural and resource settings.

CDFW Consultation History

CDFW staff visited the property with Humboldt County Planning & Building Department Senior Planner Steve Lazar in November of 2025. CDFW has reviewed the IS/MND and associated reports.

Biological Significance

The Project site is within the Larabee Creek Watershed, which is comprised of oak woodland, mixed coniferous forests, and grasslands, some of which are considered Sensitive Natural Communities (SNC). Freshwater streams and associated wetlands are tributaries to Larabee Creek, which flows to the Eel River. In addition to supporting salmonids, the watershed contains extensive aquatic and terrestrial habitat for amphibians and reptiles, including yellow-legged frog (*Rana boylii*; CDFW Species of Special Concern [SSC]) and northern red-legged frog (*Rana aurora*; SSC). Riparian areas and oak woodlands represent foraging and denning habitat for northern California ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus raptor;* CDFW Fully Protected [FP]), and the matrix of forest, woodland, and grassland support a diverse suite of resident and migratory birds, including golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*; FP), bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*; State listed as endangered [SE], FP), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*), and northern spotted owl (Strix occidentalis caurina; federally listed as threatened [FT], State listed as threatened [ST]). Several

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special status plant species have also been documented in Larabee Creek watershed, including Humboldt County milk-vetch (A*stragalus agnicidus;* SE, California Rare Plant Rank [CRPR] 1B.1), coast fawn lily (*Erythronium revolutum*; CRPR 2B.2), Pacific gilia (*Gilia capitata* ssp. *pacifica;* CRPR 1B.2), Siskiyou checkerbloom (*Sidalcea malviflora* ssp. *patula*; CRPR 1B.2), beaked tracyina (T*racyina rostrata*; CRPR 1B.2), and Baker's navarretia (*Navarretia leucocephala* ssp. *bakeri;* CRPR 1B.1). These plant species are designated as 1B or 2B ranking by the California Native Plant Society, meaning that they are limited throughout their range with most of them being endemic to California. The Project site is representative of the Larabee Creek Watershed and contains suitable habitat for many of the aforementioned species.

Comments and Recommendations

As written, the IS/MND does not provide sufficient information to enable meaningful review or substantiate the finding that this Project as proposed will not have a significant effect on the environment. This is due in part to ambiguity surrounding the secondary phase of the Project, which involves developing guest accommodations and other amenities. However, the underlying issue is the limited amount of site-specific information regarding special status species and sensitive habitats, without which CDFW cannot evaluate the potential significance of environmental impacts or recommend appropriate avoidance and minimization measures. The IS/MND relies on reconnaissance-level surveys and database queries, which are a useful screening tool in preliminary planning, but should not replace protocol-level surveys. Given the environmental context and extent of Project activities, CDFW recommends conducting focused surveys or providing existing data to address specific concerns detailed below. If the final scale and footprint of the Project can adjust to accommodate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures, CDFW believes surveys may be deferred to a later stage of planning. Mitigation measures should be formulated for each potentially significant impact, identifying performance standards as well as potential action(s) to achieve them (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15126.4).

Special Status Plants and Sensitive Natural Communities. The conclusions presented in the Biological Reconnaissance Assessment (BRA) are based on a preliminary four-hour inspection of the property. To adequately evaluate potential impacts to special status plants, botanical surveys should be floristic in nature, meaning that every plant taxon is identified to the taxonomic level necessary to determine rarity and listing status. Ideally, this means visiting a site several times during the growing season to capture species when they are

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readily evident and identifiable. However, for this BRA the biologist visited the site once in June and provided only a broad description of the vegetation. Despite the lack of survey data, the report concluded the Project will not result in adverse impacts to special status plants or communities. The property contains suitable habitat for a variety of special status plant species, including several known to occur in naturalized grasslands or open woodlands (e.g., Humboldt County milk-vetch, Siskiyou checkerbloom, Pacific gilia). There is at least one Sensitive Natural Community (SNC), Oregon white oak woodland and forest (*Quercus garryana*; S3), which occurs in an area where several structures are proposed. In its assessment of wildfire risk, the IS/MND explicitly mentions 100-foot defensible space requirements around all structures, which would necessitate substantial tree removal within the SNC.

To address potential impacts to special status plants and SNCs, CDFW recommends 1) conducting protocol-level botanical surveys prior to any project-related ground disturbance, and 2) formulating mitigation measures as a contingency for any unavoidable impacts (**Recommendation 1**). In addition to a floristic inventory, the survey effort should identify and map SNCs, as described in CDFW's March 2018 *Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Natural Communities* (**Recommendation 2**). Mitigation for impacts to special status plants and SNCs could include restoration or enhancement of existing communities (e.g., successional management, invasive species removal, etc.) or reestablishment in suitable habitat via seed collection and propagation.

Northern Spotted Owl. The assessment by Leopardo Wildlife Associates concludes that the proposed Project is unlikely to impact the northern spotted owl (NSO). However, this conclusion is currently not substantiated with survey data. The report references historical data from the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB), which is a positive detection database; the absence of NSO detections does not confirm their absence in the area. The report also mentions previous surveys completed for Timber Harvest Plans (THP) but does not provide the level of detail necessary to determine whether these surveys extend coverage to the Project area and adjoining forested lands. The Project is located adjacent to potential NSO habitat and within approximately one-third of a mile of a known NSO Activity Center (CDFW 2025).

The operation of cannabis cultivation sites near NSO Activity Centers poses risks of potential impacts and/or take of the NSO under both the California

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Endangered Species Act (CESA) and the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). Cannabis cultivation sites can generate significant noise from road use, construction, and other equipment, with wildlife responding at levels as low as 46–60 dB, about the volume of normal conversation (Delaney et al. 1999; Barber et al. 2009). Owls and other nocturnal foragers are especially vulnerable to increased noise disturbance (USFWS 2006), and NSO may experience visual disturbance within 100 meters of nest trees or suitable habitat. Increased human presence near nest sites can alter activity budgets, particularly prey handling/delivery and diurnal behaviors during the breeding season (USFWS 2004). In addition to noise and visual disturbance associated with routine operations and increased human activity, the Project as proposed would generate more substantial noise in the form of helicopter traffic, which may result in harm if birds flush from the nest (Delaney et al. 1999, USFWS 2020).

Without protocol level surveys, potential impacts to NSO cannot be fully evaluated. CDFW recommends following the Humboldt County Cannabis Program EIR Mitigation 3.4-1e, which includes conducting surveys and implementing avoidance measures (**Recommendation 3**). This would require completing two years of protocol level surveys prior to any ground-disturbing activities. Alternatively, if recent NSO surveys associated with timber harvest indicate that NSO will not be impacted by the proposed project, CDFW requests that all relevant survey data and maps be provided to support this conclusion (**Recommendation 4**). CDFW also recommends postponing approval of the helicopter use to access the site until additional analysis has been completed to evaluate potential noise disturbance impacts (**Recommendation 5**).

Golden Eagle. As with NSO, the IS/MND acknowledges the potential for golden eagle but concludes the Project as proposed is unlikely to adversely affect the species. However, this brief analysis is based on reconnaissance-level observations and a query of CNDDB, not survey data. The CNDDB is not an exhaustive or comprehensive inventory, so the data therein should not be interpreted as definitive presence or absence of a species. The Biological Reconnaissance Assessment dismisses the potential for nesting habitat because the property and surrounding area do not contain rock outcrops or cliffs, but golden eagles are known to nest in large trees (Driscoll 2010, Chinnici et al. 2012, Katzner et al. 2020). The Project site and surrounding area contain suitable foraging habitat in the form of large, open grasslands. Even if the property does not support an active nest, it may fall within the core area of an off-site nest. The

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conversion of foraging habitat and disturbance associated with long-term operation of the site could affect nearby nests. Golden eagles are sensitive to anthropogenic disturbance and may alter behavior or abandon nest sites in response to even low or moderate levels of activity within 1000 meters (0.62 miles) of the nest (Hansen et al. 2017, Katzner et al. 2020). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recommends a one-mile no-disturbance buffer around golden eagle nests for most activities, including construction, agriculture, and recreation (USFWS 2021). If there is a nest within that one-mile radius, Project activities could interfere with breeding, provisioning, and sheltering behavior, potentially resulting in nest failure or abandonment.

However, without sufficient data or a more thorough analysis of golden eagle presence, CDFW cannot evaluate risk or recommend effective and feasible mitigation measures. Although protocol-level surveys conducted for similar commercial cannabis projects in the Blocksburg area (Blocksburg Family Farm, LLC and HumSun 3, LLC Commercial Cannabis Project) did not detect golden eagles, reliable coverage did not encompass the current Project site. Detection, positive identification, and accurate observations of behavior would be challenging beyond a mile radius, particularly for a species with cryptic nesting behavior. Furthermore, concurrent surveys for a neighboring THP (1-20-00062-HUM) observed at least one golden eagle, as well as an American peregrine falcon. The report also mentioned a pair of golden eagles recorded during 2020 surveys. The data for all three surveys is now several years old, and new territories may have been established in the meantime. If more recent surveys for timber harvest provide coverage of the Project site, CDFW requests copies of any data and associated maps for its review (**Recommendation 6**). If the area has not been recently surveyed, CDFW recommends conducting protocol-level surveys prior to Project implementation. Surveys should occur between January and June and consist of several three- to four-hour observation periods from stationary vantage points that afford an unobstructed view of potential habitat, as described in *Interim Golden Eagle Inventory and Monitoring Protocols; and Other Recommendations* (Pagel et al. 2010) or *Protocol for Golden Eagle Occupancy, Reproduction, and Prey Population Assessment* (Driscoll 2010)(**Recommendation 7**). If surveys discover a nest or detect adults exhibiting breeding behaviors (e.g., courtship, nest building, territorial defense), the Project proponent should consult with CDFW to avoid or minimize impacts (**Recommendation 8**).

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Aquatic Resource Assessment. As acknowledged in the Biological Reconnaissance Assessment, the subject parcel contains riparian, wet areas consistent with wetland habitat, and stream habitat. Mountain Creek is a perennial fish-bearing stream with high intrinsic potential (IP) for steelhead trout, and its tributaries, riparian areas and wetlands represent suitable habitat for a variety of species, including northern red-legged frog, coast fawn lily, and Howell's montia. The IS/MND repeatedly references adherence to the County's Streamside Management Area (SMA) setbacks as a means of mitigating impacts to a less-than-significant level. This avoidance and minimization approach is applied broadly to riparian areas, wetlands, and water quality, as well as special status species (e.g., fish, coast fawn lily). However, it is unclear whether the streams and wetlands depicted in site plans were verified on the ground during the Biological Reconnaissance Assessment, which only mentions a preliminary desktop review. During the November 2025 site visit, CDFW staff noted at least one unmapped area where hydrophytic vegetation and landscape position suggested potential wetland habitat. The County's General Plan requires site-specific resource mapping to identify the boundaries of Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHA) and to establish appropriate buffer zones. To confirm the extent of sensitive habitat and establish appropriate setbacks, CDFW recommends conducting an aquatic resources assessment based on field observations of channel morphology, wetland or riparian vegetation, hydric soils, and other indicators of hydrology (**Recommendation 9**). Where wetland indicators are present, a formal wetland delineation may be warranted and should adhere to methods described in the *Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual and Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Western Mountains, Valleys, and Coast Region, Version 2.0* (**Recommendation 10**).

Road Network. The IS/MND states under the Mitigation and Monitoring section that immediately upon completion of construction, the Applicant will establish a Road Maintenance Association with the neighboring commercial land uses. The Humboldt County Commercial Cannabis Land Use Ordinance (CCLUO) states the Applicant shall establish a road association prior to operation or provisional permit approval. (HCC§55.4.12.1.8.4.1). CDFW recommends the Applicant be required to establish a road association prior to project development (**Recommendation 11**).

The 2023 Road Analysis by Omsberg and Preston was prepared to determine improvements required to bring the access road network appurtenant to the

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Project site up to Humboldt County's Road Category 4 standards (HCC Title III Div. 2 Appendix § 4-1 Subsection d) and to address requirements under the CCLUO (HCC§55.4.12.1.8). The access road starts at Alderpoint Road and heads north through APNs 217-281-001, 217-271-002, and 217-255-005, terminating at the Project parcel. According to the Road Analysis, the northernmost segment of road does not meet the Humboldt County Code (HCC) HCO Category 4 road standards, nor does it have the capacity to accommodate the proposed use. To protect the biological integrity and habitat value of tributaries associated with the access roads, CDFW recommends upgrading the appurtenant access road following recommendations outlined in the Road Analysis (**Recommendation 12**).

The IS/MND does not include an analysis of the road network within the parcel. To protect the biological integrity and habitat value of the tributary CDFW recommends the whole of the Project road network be surveyed. The surveys should include identification of sediment discharge points to any water ways, stream crossings, and existing road drainage features. CDFW recommends a plan to upgrade the appurtenant access road be prepared prior to Project development. The plan should include prioritization goals and a timeline for implementation (**Recommendation 13**). Proposed or existing activities that may substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow of, or substantially change or use any material from the bed, channel or bank of any river, stream, or lake require notification from CDFW pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 1602 et seq. (Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement; LSAA) and may be subject to the permitting authority of other state and federal agencies (i.e., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board).

Summary of Recommendations

1) To address potential impacts to special status plant species, conduct protocol-level botanical surveys prior to any project related ground disturbing activities and to develop mitigation measures for any unavoidable impacts.

2) To address potential impacts to SNCs, identify and map all natural community assemblages within the parcel.

3) To address potential impacts to NSO, CDFW recommends following the Cannabis Program EIR Mitigation 3.4-1e (surveys and avoidance). A qualified biologist, familiar with the life history of the northern spotted owl, shall conduct preconstruction surveys for nests within a 1.3-mile buffer

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around the site as described in Protocol for Surveying Proposed Management Activities that May Impact Northern Spotted Owls (USFWS 2012).

4) If recent NSO surveys associated with projects in the area demonstrate that NSO will not be impacted by the proposed project, CDFW requests that all relevant survey data and maps be provided to support this conclusion.

5) CDFW recommends postponing approval of the helicopter until additional analysis has been completed to evaluate potential noise disturbance impacts to sensitive wildlife species.

6) If recent golden eagle surveys for timber harvest provide coverage of the Project site, CDFW requests copies of any data and associated maps for review.

7) If the area has not been recently surveyed, CDFW recommends conducting protocol-level surveys for golden eagles prior to Project implementation. Surveys should occur between January and June and consist of three- to four-hour observation periods from stationary vantage points that afford an unobstructed view of potential habitat, as described in *Interim Golden Eagle Inventory and Monitoring Protocols; and Other Recommendations* (Pagel et al. 2010) or *Protocol for Golden Eagle Occupancy, Reproduction, and Prey Population Assessment* (Driscoll 2010).

8) If surveys discover a golden eagle nest or detect adult golden eagles exhibiting breeding behaviors (e.g., courtship, nest building, territorial defense), the Project proponent should consult with CDFW to avoid or minimize impacts.

9) To fully characterize the extent of aquatic resources and future site development, CDFW recommends a field assessment based on channel morphology, wetland or riparian vegetation, and other indicators of hydrology.

10) Where wetland indicators are present, a formal wetland delineation may be warranted and should adhere to methods described in the *Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual and Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Western Mountains, Valleys, and Coast Region, Version 2.0*

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11) CDFW recommends the Applicant be required to establish a road association prior to project development.

12) To protect the biological integrity and habitat value of tributaries associated with the access road, CDFW recommends upgrading the entire access road as needed following recommendations outlined in the Road Analysis.

13) Parcel roads to be surveyed and upgraded with prioritization goals and implementation timeline.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this IS/MND. Please contact Georgia Hamer, Environmental Scientist, with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
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