

ConocoPhillips Company
Proposed Rush 4-65 29-30 (North) Well Pad & Access Road
Proposed Rush 4-65 29-30 (South – Phase 2) Well Pad
Niobrara Project Area
Wildlife Assessment
July 11, 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 Rush 4-65 29-30 (North) well pad and access road and the proposed Rush 4-65 29-30 (South – Phase 2) well pad during 2019. The Rush 4-65 29-30 (North) site is a new proposed well pad and access road and the Rush 4-65 29-30 (South – Phase 2) site is an expansion of the existing Little Rush 4-65 28 & 29-30 well pad (Figure 1). The Rush 4-65 29-30 (South – Phase 2) site would utilize the existing Little Rush access road (Figure 1). Collectively, the two proposed well pads and access road will be referred to as the proposed development.

PROJECT AREA

The proposed development is located approximately 6 miles south-southwest of Watkins, Colorado, in Section 28 T4N:R65W (Figure 1). Surface ownership is private and land use is farming and agriculture. The proposed Rush 4-65 29-30 (North) well pad is approximately 15 acres in size and the proposed access road is approximately 296 feet in length. The proposed Rush 4-65 29-30 (South – Phase 2) well pad is approximately 22 acres in size (approximately 10 of the 22 acres is located within the existing Little Rush well pad). The proposed development is located entirely within a cultivated agricultural field and the location is just west of Coal Creek.

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

Two raptor nest sites are known to occur within 1 mile of the proposed development (Figure 1). The two raptor nest sites included two bald eagle nests. Of the two bald eagle nests, nest #168, which is approximately 0.55 miles from the proposed well pads, is active (chicks in the nest) in 2019, and nest site #5, which is approximately 0.58 miles from the proposed pad, has been gone since 2014 when it fell from the nest tree. Red-tailed hawk nest #75, which is approximately 1.1 miles from the proposed pad, is also active in 2019.

Black-tailed Prairie Dog

Based on aerial imagery, two black-tailed prairie dog colonies are located within 0.25 miles of the proposed development (Figure 1). One colony appears to be located directly adjacent to the proposed pad along the eastern edge of the Rush (North pad). The second colony, which is much larger, occurs on the other side of Coal Creek east of the pad locations approximately 0.21 miles east of the pads.

Swift Fox Dens

The habitat in the vicinity of the proposed pads appears to be unsuitable for swift fox and the presence of breeding den locations is believed to be highly unlikely. Indeed, 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 proposed well pads and access road are expected to be minimal. Actual surface disturbance is limited to previously disturbed farming and agricultural private land. The proposed project is relatively close to 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 pads, which is the maximum spatial and/or temporal protective buffer distance recommended by Colorado Parks and Wildlife for the protection of raptor nests, including bald eagles (CDOW 2008). Lastly swift fox dens are highly unlikely to occur in the area of proposed surface disturbance given the location is almost exclusively within previously-disturbed cultivated habitat (i.e., agricultural field). According to Colorado Parks and Wildlife (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. 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.

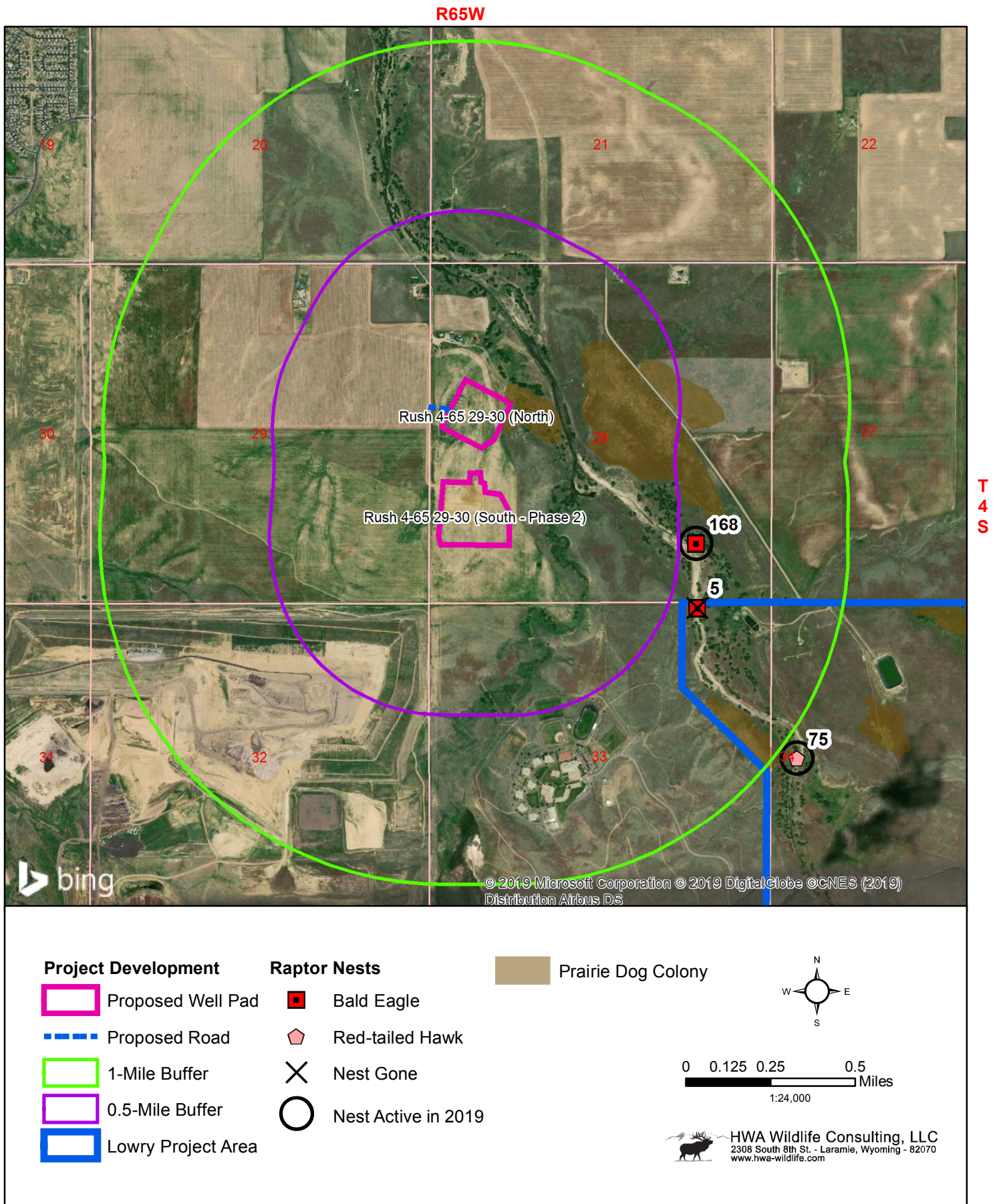


Figure 1. Known wildlife resources relative to the proposed Rush 4-65 29-30 (North and South) well pads and access road, in Arapahoe County, Colorado.