

**Whelan Ranch
Habitat Conservation Area**
(CNLM No: S007)

Annual Report
October 1, 2013 – September 30, 2014

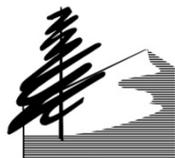
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Table of Contents

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS	4
III.	BIOLOGICAL SURVEYS	4
IV.	HABITAT RESTORATION AND MAINTENANCE.....	6
1.	COASTAL SAGE SCRUB RESTORATION	6
2.	FUEL BREAKS	7
3.	THREATS	8
V.	PUBLIC SERVICE.....	8
VI.	REPORTING	8
1.	ANNUAL REPORTS AND WORKPLANS	8
2.	MANAGEMENT PLAN.....	11
3.	BUDGETS/FINANCES	11
VII.	SUMMARY & DISCUSSION	11
VIII.	REFERENCES.....	11

Figures

Figure 1.	HCA Overview Location.....	2
Figure 2.	HCA Location.....	3
Figure 3.	Sensitive Species Location and Access Road Extension.....	5

Tables

Table 1.	Survey Dates, Times and Weather Conditions.....	4
Table 2.	HCA Threats	9
Table 3.	Funding Status	11

I. Introduction

This report summarizes the management activities carried out on the Whelan Ranch Habitat Conservation Area (HCA) by the Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM) during the fiscal year of October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2014. The tasks and objectives discussed below are those derived from the *Whelan Preserve Five Year Management Plan: 2013-Onward* (CNLM 2013a), and from the *Whelan Ranch Habitat Conservation Area 2013-2014 Annual Workplan* (CNLM 2013b).

The Whelan Ranch HCA is located north and west of the City of Oceanside Municipal Golf Course, east of the San Luis Rey Wastewater Treatment Plant, and south of Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, in the City of Oceanside, California (Figures 1 and 2). The HCA encompasses just over 123-acres and is comprised of primarily of non-native grassland, and to a lesser extent, Diegan coastal sage scrub. A small stand of riparian vegetation is found on the eastern edge of Windmill Lake, and relatively minor segments of native grassland and native forbland area also found within the HCA. The dominant plant community is non-native grassland, which became dominant after portions of the HCA were graded for development. The HCA was also historically used for cattle grazing and for growing tomatoes. The HCA supports the federally-listed as threatened coastal California gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica californica*; CAGN). CNLM took ownership of the property in 1998 and received final payments to fund the stewardship endowment about five years later.

Management includes capital improvements, biological surveys, habitat restoration, public services and reporting. Each of these activities and their results are summarized below and are described within this report.

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

- Fuel breaks were mowed and cleared of dead woody vegetation
- A sensitive species survey was conducted
- The HCA was patrolled and small amounts of trash were removed
- A dirt access road was created/extended to the far north of the site
- An annual report, work plan and budget were developed and submitted to the City of Oceanside and the Wildlife Agencies

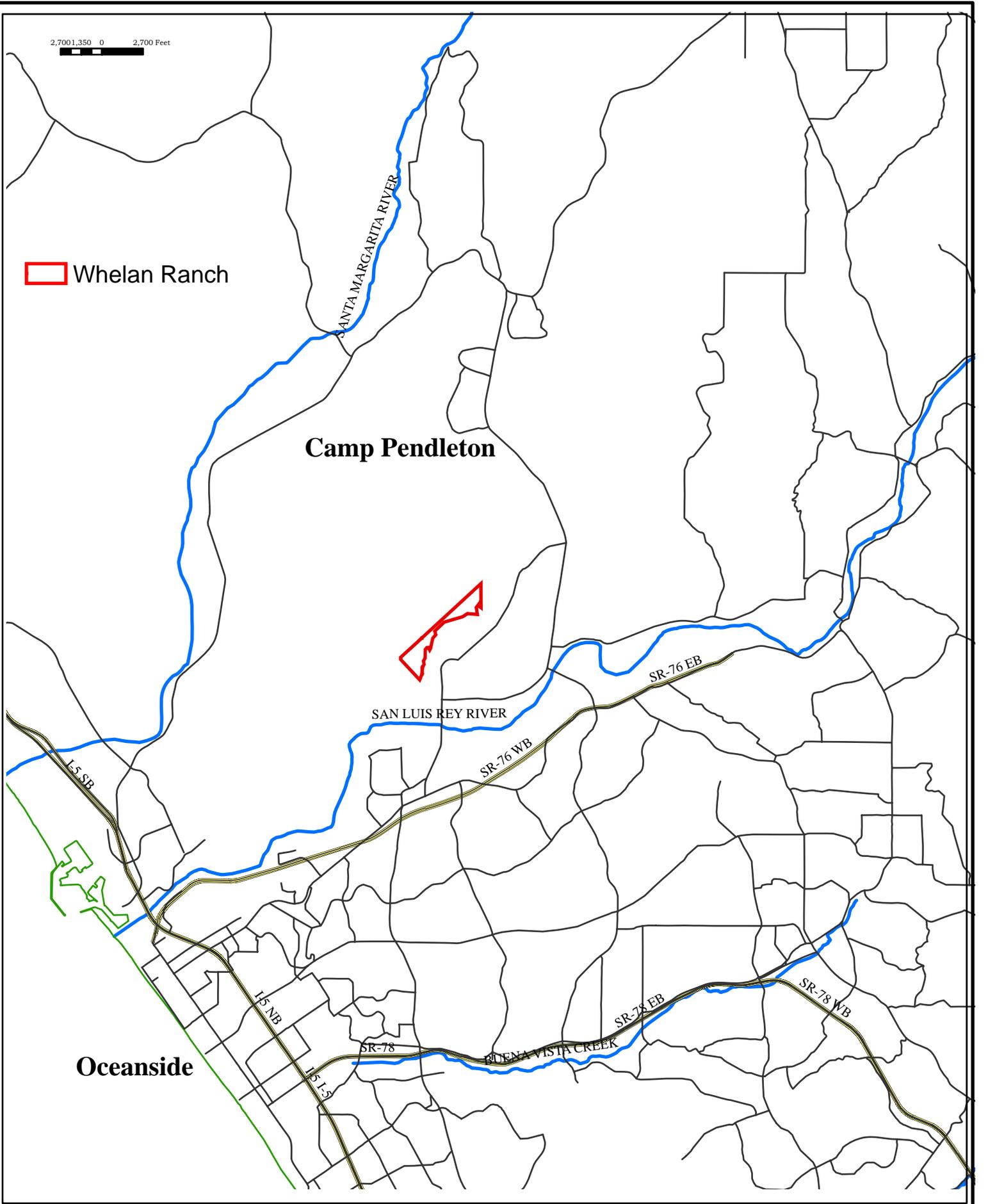


Figure 1
Preserve Vicinity
Whelan Ranch Habitat Conservation Area - Oceanside, CA



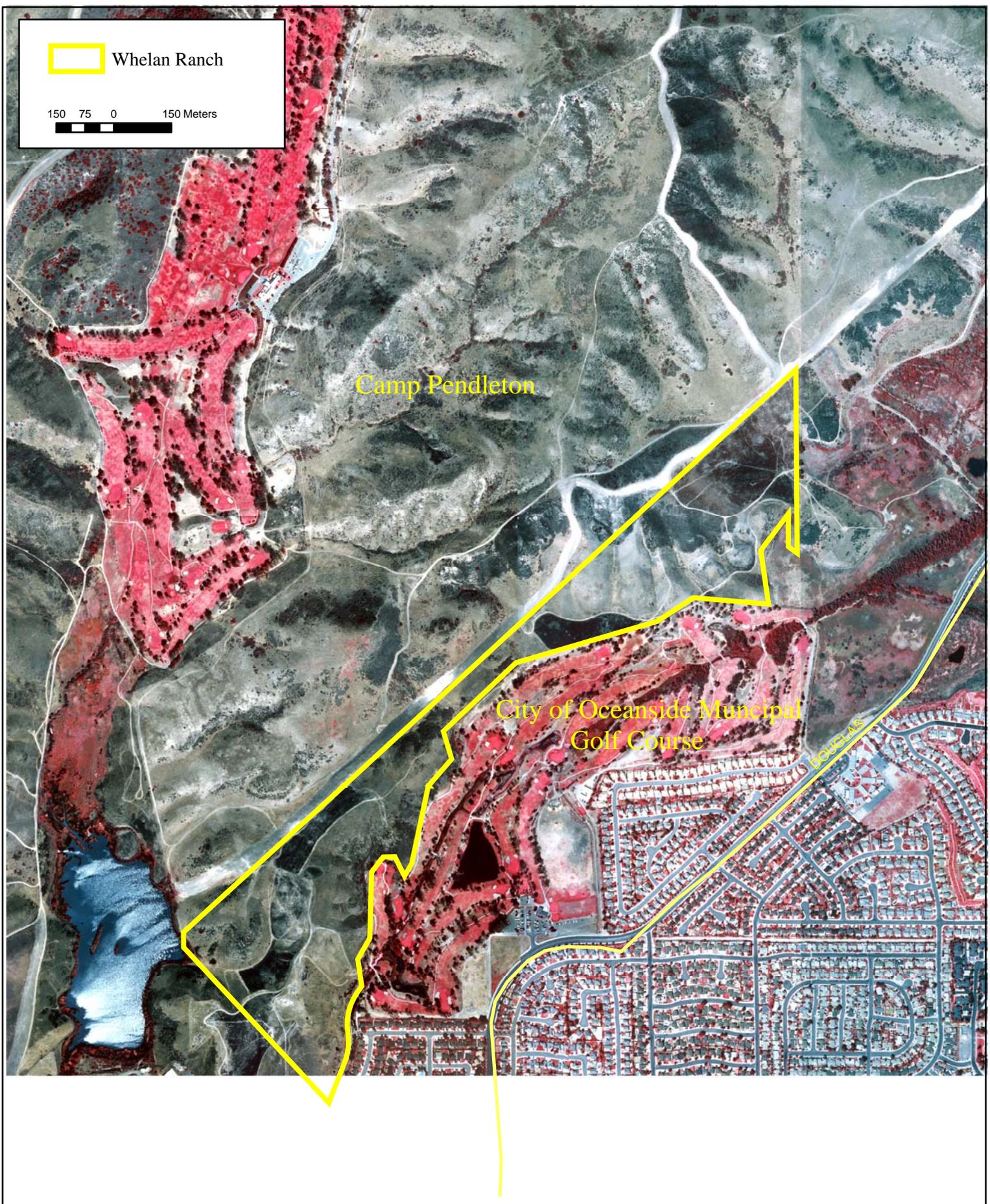


Figure 2
Preserve Location
Whelan Ranch Habitat Conservation Area - Oceanside, CA



II. Capital Improvements

Signs have been installed along the HCA periphery and at main access points. The signs state that the area is a habitat conservation area and describes what activities are allowed or prohibited. All signs were maintained as necessary to ensure readability and visibility around the HCA.

In an effort to improve site accessibility, an existing dirt access road was improved and extended through the HCA to provide access to the northern-most drivable point (Figure 3). The access road required some minor grading and the installation of water-bars in some areas where the road traversed a slope. Most of the road only required mowing close to the ground.

III. Biological Surveys

The HCA *Habitat Management Plan* (CNLM 2013a) outlines the goals of biological monitoring and management. Monitoring includes focused surveys for the CAGN and assessments for nonnative plant species. Monitoring also involves noting other plant and animal species incidentally observed during surveys. The HCA has a very limited budget, so only a few management tasks are accomplished each year.

This year, biological monitoring activities included surveys for cactus wren (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*), CAGN, and burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) (Table 1). Results for the surveys were negative for the presence burrowing owl and cactus wren. A single CAGN male was observed on-site during the surveys (see Figure 3). This individual was observed calling in the south-western portion of the property. No female, nests, or nesting activity was observed. It is thought this individual is using the HCA in conjunction with other, offsite habitat to the west of the HCA.

Table 1. Survey Dates, Times and Weather Conditions

Date (2014)	Time	Weather	Type of Survey	Results
March 18	0830-1130	Start: sunny, 0-2 mph wind, 58°F; Stop: sunny, 3-5 mph, 66°F	CAGN, CAWR	Negative for CAGN and CAWR
April 7	0800-1200	Start: sunny, 1-2 mph wind, 60°F; Stop: sunny, 2-3 mph, 67°F	CAGN, CAWR, BUOW	Positive for CAGN, negative for CAWR and BUOW
May 5	0800-1145	Start: sunny, 1-2 mph wind, 58°F; Stop: sunny, 3-5 mph, 68°F	CAGN, CAWR, BUOW	Negative for CAGN, CAWR, BUOW

No other sensitive species were detected during the surveys.



Figure 3
Sensitive Species Location

Whelan Ranch Preserve, Oceanside, CA

400 200 0 400 Feet

Center for Natural Lands Management



IV. Habitat Restoration and Maintenance

1. Coastal Sage Scrub Restoration

Natural Resources Conservation Service Wildlife Habitat Conservation Program and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Joint Grant (2009 and 2011 Applications)

During the spring of 2009, CNLM prepared a joint coastal sage scrub (CSS) restoration grant application to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) PFW grant program and the NRCS WHIP. The proposal was to restore approximately 30 acres adjacent to the (previously funded and restored) 5-acre site and to enhance the original 5-acre site (see Figure 4 in CNLM 2011b). The grant was awarded and restoration activities commenced in winter 2010. Approximately 14 acres were sprayed with Fusilade II in winter 2010 as funding that year would not allow for additional acreage to be treated. In 2011, a total of 24 acres (24 acres includes the original 14 acres that were sprayed with Fusilade II) were disked two times to kill non-native grasses and forbs and to reduce thatch levels. The 24 acres includes five areas: Area 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The 24 acres are an estimation based on a Geographic Information System (GIS) Program calculation, taking slope into consideration. It was not possible to restore a full 30-acres due to the steep terrain and equipment limitations. After disking, the prepared areas were imprinted with two different native seed pallets. The lower portions of Area 1 were seeded with upland/riparian transitional plant species and species able to tolerate alkaline conditions based on the soils that are present in that lower portion of Area 1. These species included: four-wing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*), coastal goldenbush (*Isocoma menziesii*), and wild rye (*Leymus triticoides*). All other areas were seeded with coastal goldenbush, California sage (*Artemisia californica*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), deerweed (*Lotus scoparius*), fiddleneck (*Amsinckia menziesii*), and fascicled tarplant (*Deinandra fasciculatum*).

After imprinting occurred, and the non-native grasses began to sprout and grow, Fusilade II was applied in late winter, 2011 (Jan/Feb). Following the Fusilade application, all 24 acres were mowed twice during the spring to control mustard species (*Brassica* spp.), bristly ox-tongue (*Picris echioides*) and wire lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*). During the summer and early fall of 2011, Areas 2, 3, 4 and 5 were watered twice using a water truck. Area 1 was deemed moist enough to preclude the need for supplemental water.

In 2011, all of the seeded species had been observed in all restoration areas, except for on the steep slopes located above Area 1, the steep west-facing slope on Area 3 and the steep east-facing slope on Area 5. Only non-native forbs and grasses have been observed on these slopes. The restoration contractor that imprinted the areas thought that perhaps the slopes did not receive enough light or warmth to promote sprouting.

In 2011-12, some of the restoration areas were mowed to knock back and down black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), which is a dominate non-native species in the area. These areas were mowed twice during the spring of 2012, and these activities seemed to have a positive effect. At this

time only a few shrubs have been observed and few natives were observed during the spring of 2012. It should be noted that this is what was observed in the 5-acre site as well, and the 5 acre site is dominated by native shrubs.

In 2011, CNLM was awarded another \$5,000 from the PFW program to continue to enhance the 24-acre restoration area and in 2011 CNLM was awarded \$13,257 from the NRCS WHIP to control tamarisk (*Tamarisk* spp.) and fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) throughout portions of the HCA, which were then treated during the 2011-2012 management period.

At present, the restoration areas are showing some minor progress in overall development. Due to the continued drought conditions experienced during 2013-2014, non-native plant species were less of a competitive factor for the native plant species within the restoration areas. In general, the native plant species already present on-site have continued to grow produce greater overall cover. In addition, some small, newly germinated species, such as *Artemisia*, were observed within the restoration areas (albeit in relatively low abundance). It appears the very dry conditions may have provided a slight advantage to native plant species development compared to the non-native plant species observed within the restoration areas.

Overall, however (at a landscape level) the continued development toward a self-sustaining stand of coastal sage scrub remains minimal. Reasons for the overall poor performance of the imprinting is unclear, and may be due to a variety of factors including; prior chemical treatments negatively effecting the native seed and not properly controlling competitive non-native plant species, uncondusive environmental conditions such as, drought/inappropriate soil moisture, inappropriate soil/ambient temperatures, poor soil conditions/chemistry, low viability of the seed stock, etc. The restoration areas will continue to be monitored in the future. And, if new funding becomes available, efforts to improve the restoration efforts will be taken.

The 2009 WHIP/PFW Project also required that 30 raptor perches be constructed and erected on the HCA. In early 2011, a Boy Scout constructed and erected the raptor perches in order to gain his Eagle Scout badge. Most of the perches remain in good condition and it is common to observe raptors perched upon them. At least two have fallen due to materials degradation/fatigue. Species commonly observed included American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) and red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*).

2. Fuel Breaks

The fuel break along the south eastern property boundary was mowed during the past year (as is done every year), brush was removed/mowed with a tractor pulled mowing deck, and non-native annual grasses and forbs were weed whipped in the stretch of habitat located in between a brow ditch and the HCA fence line. In total, an approximate 40-foot fuel reduction zone was maintained. Please refer to the 2007-2008 annual report for a detailed description and photographs of this fuel zone (CNLM 2008).

3. Threats

In 2008, CNLM developed an HCA threats table (Table 1). This table lists, describes, and discusses management actions for identified potential threats encountered in the HCA. HCA threats have remained unchanged at this time, with the most prominent threat being non-native plant species within the restoration areas and abutting remnant stands of native coastal sage scrub.

V. Public Service

Public service activities have mostly centered on patrolling to assess any illegal trespass or dumping. The entire HCA is being patrolled approximately once per month throughout the year. During the current management period, one breach was identified in a fence dividing the golf course and the HCA. Through this break in the fence, some landscape cuttings were deposited on the HCA. Overall, the incident was considered minor. The fence has been repaired and NO TRESPASSING signage was installed. Since these efforts, no further trespass has been observed.

VI. Reporting

Reporting activities include report writing, data analysis, GIS data gathering, compilation and analysis, meetings and regional coordination, and photo documentation activities. Data that have been entered into ARC View GIS (10.1) include vegetation communities, parcel, project and preserve boundaries, and sensitive plant and animal locations.

1. Annual Reports and Workplans

An annual management and monitoring report and work plan are prepared and provided to the City of Oceanside, USFWS and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) by December 31 of each year. The reporting/fiscal year is October 1 to September 30. The annual report reflects work performed during the previous reporting year and the work plan will reflect the efforts to take place during current reporting year. The annual report includes:

1. An accounting of management funds expended during the previous year and the status of the endowment.
2. A general description of the status of biological resources.
3. Biological monitoring methods, analyses and results.
4. A description of management actions conducted within the fiscal year.
5. A description of problems, if any, encountered in managing the HCA.
6. A description of management actions CNLM expects to undertake in the coming year.
7. Pertinent photographs.

The annual work plan will describe management actions CNLM expects to undertake in the current year.

Table 2. HCA Threats

Threats to the HCA	Location	Size or Severity	Management Actions during 2013-2014	Future Planned Actions
Weeds				
Australian Saltbush (<i>Atriplex semibaccata</i>) M (G, CSS, F)	Throughout the HCA.	Severity is low.	None taken.	Continue to treat individuals as they appear in and adjacent to the CSS restoration areas.
Fennel (<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>) H (G, CSS, F)	Throughout the HCA.	Very large; thousands of plants located on the HCA.	Thousands treated in 2012. Few treated in 2013-2014	Continue to treat as funding permits.
Non-native Forbs: Black Mustard (<i>Brassica nigra</i>) M; Sahara Mustard (<i>Brassica tournefortii</i>) L; Tocalote (<i>Centaurea melitensis</i>) M; Bull Thistle (<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>) H; Mustard (<i>Hirschfeldia incana</i>) L; wild radish (<i>Raphanus sativus</i>) L; and other nonnative forbs to a lesser degree (G, CSS, F)	Throughout the HCA.	Severity is high; acreage unknown. Mixed in with nonnative grassland and coastal sage scrub habitats.	Minor treatments performed due to limited budget.	No actions planned at this time.
Non-native Annual Grasses: Ripgut Brome (<i>Bromus diandrus</i>) M, Red Brome (<i>Bromus madritensis</i> ssp. <i>rubens</i>) H, Soft-chess Brome (<i>Bromus hordeaceus</i>) L, wild oats (<i>Avena fatua</i> and <i>A. barbata</i>) M, and other non-native grasses to a lesser degree (G, CSS, F)	Throughout the HCA.	Severity is high.	No major actions performed.	No actions planned at this time.
Rose Clover (<i>Trifolium hirtum</i>) M (CSS, G, F)	Located in the furthest southwestern CSS patch.	Severity is low.	None taken.	None planned at this time.
Russian Thistle (<i>Salsola spp</i>) L (G, CSS, F)	Throughout the HCA.	Severity is moderate.	Individuals treated and hand pulled in and adjacent to the CSS restoration areas and along access road.	Treat and hand pull as necessary.
Saltcedar (<i>Tamarix spp.</i>) H (R)	Northwestern corner of Whelan Lake.	Several large trees.	None.	Treat resprouting individuals as necessary to control spread.
Tree tobacco (<i>Nicotiana glauca</i>) M (G, CSS, F)	Throughout the HCA, but primarily in the middle of the HCA.	Approximately 50 within the HCA.	Several individuals cut and sprayed.	Cut and stump spray where found, prevent seed production.

Alteration of Natural Disturbance and Cycles				
Altered Fire Frequency and Intensity	Altered Fire Frequency and Intensity.	Altered Fire Frequency and Intensity.	No action planned at this time.	No action planned at this time.
Climate Change	Climate Change.	Climate Change.	No action planned at this time.	No action planned at this time.
Direct Human Impacts				
Unwanted trespass and vandalism	Central lower elevations adjacent to golf course	Severity is low. Some landscape material dumping	Maintained existing fencing and signage.	Continue to repair existing fencing and install new fences in strategic locations when needed.
Erosion	In at least one area in the southwest portion of the HCA.	High; a large gully that is head cutting after every rain. Sloughing is also occurring on the sides of the gully.	None.	None, as funding is limited at this time.

H, M, L refer to California Invasive Plant Council rankings, and potential severity of plants, if present. H=high, M=moderate, L=limited. Letters in parentheses represent what habitats these invasive plants threaten in the HCA: G=native grassland, R=riparian, CSS=coastal sage scrub, F=native forb vegetation associations

- **High** – These species have severe ecological impacts on physical processes, plant and animal communities, and vegetation structure. Their reproductive biology and other attributes are conducive to moderate to high rates of dispersal and establishment. Most are widely distributed ecologically.
- **Moderate** – These species have substantial and apparent—but generally not severe—ecological impacts on physical processes, plant and animal communities, and vegetation structure. Their reproductive biology and other attributes are conducive to moderate to high rates of dispersal, though establishment is generally dependent upon ecological disturbance. Ecological amplitude and distribution may range from limited to widespread.
- **Limited** – These species are invasive but their ecological impacts are minor on a statewide level or there was not enough information to justify a higher score. Their reproductive biology and other attributes result in low to moderate rates of invasiveness. Ecological amplitude and distribution are generally limited, but these species may be locally persistent and problematic

2. Management Plan

An updated habitat management plan (CNLM 2013a) was completed in October 2013 to outline goals, objectives, and management actions to be performed at the HCA. The habitat management plan (in concert with the annual work plan) is to be the guiding document for the HCA.

3. Budgets/Finances

Total expenditures (not including grant expenditures) for this past year were \$6,911 from a planned budget of \$6,704. The endowment as of September 30, 2014 is \$169,673.

Table 3. Funding Status

Inception Date	Original Endowment	Endowment as of 9/30/2013	Endowment as of 9/30/2014	Inflation Adjusted Endowment as of 9/30/2014
12/1998	\$122,872	\$152,769	169,672	\$164,898

VII. Summary & Discussion

This year's management was successful at providing site protection, maintaining site standards, improving site accessibility, and developing a better understanding of the HCA and its regional context. Management in the upcoming year will be similar to the previous year.

VIII. References

CNLM 2013a. Whelan Ranch Habitat Conservation Area Habitat Management Plan. October 2013-onward. October.

CNLM 2013b. Whelan Habitat Conservation Area Annual Work Plan 2013-2014. Center for Natural Lands Management. October 2013.

CNLM 2011b. Whelan Ranch Habitat Conservation Area Annual Report 2010-11. December 2011.

CNLM 2008. Whelan Ranch Habitat Conservation Area Annual Report October 2007 – September 2008. December 2008.