

SOUTH BAY SALT POND RESTORATION PROJECT

Adaptive Management Meeting: *California Gulls*

Meeting Summary

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This initial Adaptive Management meeting to address the California gull (CAGU) issue was held on December 18, 2006, 10am to 1pm at Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters. Gull researchers and Project Management Team members attended. See the list of attendees at the end of this summary.

By way of background, the Adaptive Management Summary Table in the Project's Adaptive Management Plan and EIS/S includes a restoration target to maintain breeding birds at pre-ISP levels. California gulls are one of the topics of study under "Applied Studies", because their impacts on other breeding species are largely unknown. Several recent studies indicate California gulls are significant predators on breeding avocets, stilts and terns. These studies are early warning signals that California gulls could pose a threat to the population of breeding birds in the Project area, and perhaps other species such as the endangered western snowy plover and the California least tern. Given these data and the increasing size of the gull colonies, Project scientists and managers agreed that the gull management trigger ("Increases in predatory/ competitive species, such as California gulls, to population or activity levels that may threaten maintaining numbers of breeding avocets, stilts and terns") has been tripped. Thus, the Project managers have initiated an adaptive management process.

During this meeting, the participants reviewed current data and discussed the applied studies and management measures that are potential next steps for the Project in the adaptive management process. These were the primary topics of discussion:

- Protections afforded California Gulls as migratory birds. Nanette Seto and Tara Zimmerman, from the US Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Office in Portland, joined the meeting by phone to discuss legal protections for gulls. As migratory birds, California gulls are protected from "take" by lethal control. Lethal control includes killing adults and young, as well as harming eggs. Such measures would only be allowed under a depredation permit. Obtaining a permit is a NEPA-driven process and is very difficult. Non-lethal measures must be used first and proven to fail before even considering applying for a depredation permit. Non-lethal methods can be used before the nesting season and include hazing, harassment by dogs, pyrotechnics, flooding gull roost areas, and putting up wires to prevent gulls from landing.
 - Bottom line: Non-lethal methods must be used and monitored for their effectiveness.
- Evidence for California gull impacts on South Bay nesting birds as well as threatened and endangered species. Josh Ackerman, Cheryl Strong, Aidona Kakouros, Joy Albertson, Joelle Buffa, and Doug Bell all discussed data and observations they have collected as evidence of gull impacts. Josh's results will be available in early 2007 in a report from the USGS; recent data on gull numbers from Cheryl's work can be found on the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory website (www.sfbbo.org); and Aidona's data will be available as a Master's thesis through San Jose State University.
 - Bottom line: All researchers agreed that California gulls are a potential threat to nesting birds and special status species in the South Bay.
- Studies needed to address information gaps. Top research needs are:
 1. *Radio-telemetry study of CAGUs*, especially at A6 and the new Coyote Hills colony, to determine where gulls go to feed (foraging study), document whether they are seeking

- out snowy plovers or other nesting birds as food sources (species impacts study), and determine where CAGUs go when displaced (habitat change study).
2. *Non-lethal methods study* to determine which methods, if any, are most effective and feasible. Likely study sites are the Coyote Hills colony to see if gulls can be displaced, and likely avocet/stilt/tern colonies to see if gulls can be kept off nesting islands for other species to use. Using radio-telemetry as part of this study could help answer questions associated with the first study.
 3. *Population modeling* to assess what level of gull control will be needed to reduce the population to a manageable size and to determine if landfills are fostering rapid population growth. This work will require collecting data on model parameters.
 4. *Gull diet study* to determine landfill's importance to population growth as well as continued monitoring of indicator species (like avocets, stilts and terns) to determine gull predation rates on eggs and chicks.
- Phase 1 actions relative to CAGU studies. We agreed that:
 - before A6 is breached some gulls should be radio-tagged to determine what they do before and after breaching.
 - it would be best to undertake island development in A16 and SF2 at the same time to see if they are equally attractive to gulls displaced from A6.
 - island development in A16 should be done before A8 is “breached” to provide nesting for species currently using A8, including snowy plovers, Forster’s terns, and avocets. The largest avocet nesting colony in the South Bay is in A8.

The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project will hold a second California gull adaptive management meeting on **January 19, 2007**, from 10am to 2pm at the Don Edwards SF Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This meeting will include representatives from the US FWS Migratory Bird Office in Portland, US FWS Endangered Species Office in Sacramento, and landfill managers. The purposes of the meeting will be to:

- Refine the most promising research and management measures suggested at the first meeting;
- Get feedback on these measures from US FWS Migratory Bird and Endangered Species Office reps;
- Explore management options available at landfills.

Meeting attendees:

Clyde Morris, Don Edwards SFBNWR	John Krause, California DFG
Joelle Buffa, Don Edwards SFBNWR	Doug Bell, East Bay Regional Park District
Joy Albertson, Don Edwards SFBNWR	Cheryl Strong, SFBBO
Eric Mruz, Don Edwards SFBNWR	Roy Churchwell, SFBBO
Juan Flores, Don Edwards SFBNWR	Steve Rottenborn, HT Harvey
John Bradley, Don Edwards SFBNWR	Scott Terrill, HT Harvey
Nannette Seto, USFWS, Migratory Bird Office	Dave Shulford, PRBO, Conservation Science
Tara Zimmerman, USFWS, Migratory Bird Office	Lynne Trulio, South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project & SJSU
Brian Popper, USDA, Wildlife Services	Aidona Kakouros, SJSU
Josh Ackerman, USGS	
John Takekawa, USGS	
Bill DeJager, ACOE	