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**Contra Costa Times (Walnut Creek, CA)**

November 29, 2006

**Section:** News**Edition:** FINAL**Page:** a1**BIRDS GET EVICTION NOTICE  
TERNs TRADE RIVER FOR BAY TO SAVE SALMON**

*Denis Cuff  
Times Staff Writer*

Caspian **terns** gobbling up endangered **salmon** and steelhead on Oregon's Columbia **River** will be relocated **to** sandy shoreline areas in Richmond, Hayward and Fremont in one of the largest programs in the nation **to** disperse wild birds.

Two federal agencies announced their decision Tuesday **to** alter nesting habitat **to** drive many of the **terns** away from an island at the Columbia **River**. Baby **salmon** are easy prey there **for** the tall, fish-eating **terns**.

"The idea is **to** help the endangered **salmon**," said Jennifer Sowell, a spokeswoman **for** the federal Army Corps of Engineers in Portland, Ore. "There is such a large colony of **terns** that if you can disperse them, more of the young **salmon** will survive."

**To** prod the birds **to** leave, the government will encourage growth of plants the **terns** intensely dislike.

**To** attract the big birds **to** nest elsewhere after flying south **for** the winter, the federal government intends **to** add sand and remove weeds in six publicly owned West Coast sites where the birds already visit or nest.

If that isn't enough **to** lure in more birds, crews may set out decoys and pipe in recorded **tern** calls.

Three of the sites are in the **Bay** Area. They include Brooks Island Regional Shoreline in Richmond, Hayward Regional Shoreline and sandy areas in the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge near Fremont.

The other three spots are in Oregon at Summer and Crump lakes and Fern Ridge.

The plan by the Corps of Engineers and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service calls **for** spending \$2.4 million initially **to** improve habitat in the six sites.

Additional amounts of as much as \$269,000 a year **for** several years will be spent **to** monitor the success of the relocation.

Sowell said scientists believe the birds will move because smaller projects **to** change habitat have succeeded in steering **terns to** relocate.

East **Bay** Regional Park District officials said they would welcome federal money **to** help

the **terns** by stabilizing and restoring the eroding sand on Brooks Island.

San Francisco **Bay** waves and currents have washed away much of the narrow sand spit, leaving **terns** less room **to** breed and protect their chicks from hungry seagulls.

"The erosion is getting a lot worse," said Steve Bobzien, the park district's ecological services coordinator.

More than 1,000 **terns** nested on Brooks Island in spring 2005, but the number declined this year, he said.

Neither Bobzien nor federal officials said Tuesday how much federal money would be spent at different nesting sites.

Bobzien said the idea behind the federal project makes sense **to** help the **terns** as well as the **salmon**.

"The more you spread out the **terns**, the more likely they are **to** have success rather than fall victim **to** raptors or gulls or other predators," he said.

The **salmon-versus-terns** tension has intensified **for** two decades as humans have damaged the natural habitat of both.

With fewer sandy secluded places left **for** the **terns to** breed, the shy birds with the mohawk-shaped crown flocked **to** East Island in the Columbia **River** where sand was deposited from dredging projects.

An estimated 18,000 adults nest on Oregon's East Island, making it the largest colony of Caspian **terns** in the world.

The federal project would cut that number at least in half by 2010 or 2015, federal planners predict.

The **terns** eat roughly 1 million baby **salmon** a year on the Columbia **River**, scientists estimate.

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PHOTO 1: PHOTO A CASPIAN **TERN** returns with a bill full of food at Brooks Island colony in Richmond, which is home **to** nearly 800 pairs of the bird. PHOTO 2: NEW BREEDING PAIRS of Caspian **terns** arrive at the Brooks Island colony in Richmond from a failed colony. PHOTO 3: CASPIAN **TERN** CHICKS, about 2 weeks old, wait **for** food from their parents on Brooks Island. In Oregon, they eat endangered fish. (Gregory Urquiaga/ Times file 2005); GRAPHIC: "Relocating **terns**."

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