



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office
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IN REPLY REFER TO:
1-1-05-I-0510

FEB 14 2005

Memorandum

To: Assistant Regional Director, Migratory Birds and State Programs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Region 1 Office, Portland, Oregon

From: Acting Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office, Sacramento, California 

Subject: Informal Endangered Species Consultation for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for *Caspian Tern Management to Reduce Predation of Juvenile Salmonids in the Columbia River Estuary*

This memorandum is in response to a memorandum dated January 5, 2005, from you and the Chief of the Environmental Resources Branch for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Portland District Office concerning informal consultation for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for *Caspian Tern Management to Reduce Predation of Juvenile Salmonids in the Columbia River Estuary*. You specifically requested our concurrence with your determination that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the endangered California clapper rail (*Rallus longirostris obsoletus*) and salt marsh harvest mouse (*Reithrodontomys raviventris*), threatened delta smelt (*Hypomesus transpacificus*) and its designated critical habitat, and threatened western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*) and its proposed critical habitat. This response is in accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). Your memorandum and associated *Biological Assessment for Caspian Tern Management to Reduce Predation of Juvenile Salmonids in the Columbia River Estuary* (Biological Assessment) were received in our office on January 6, 2005.

The purpose of the proposed action is to comply with a 2002 settlement agreement by developing a management plan for Caspian terns (*Sterna caspia*) in the Columbia River estuary that reduces resource management conflicts with federally listed salmonids while ensuring the conservation of Caspian terns in the Pacific Coast/Western region. Specific to this informal consultation, the proposed action includes management actions for development and management of Caspian tern habitat at Brooks Island, Hayward Regional Shoreline, and Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge in San Francisco Bay, California. At each of these locations, various management actions would be undertaken to develop and enhance habitat for Caspian terns. In conjunction

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with these actions, a number of conservation measures would be implemented to avoid adverse effects to federally listed species. These management actions and conservation measures are identified in detail in the Biological Assessment.

We have reviewed the proposed management actions for each of the three project sites in San Francisco Bay and site-specific conservation measures to determine their effectiveness to avoid adverse effects to federally listed species. Based on our review, we have determined that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect federally listed species that currently occur or are likely to occur within or near the three project sites in San Francisco Bay. We also have determined that no critical habitat is likely to be affected by the proposed actions. Furthermore, we have reviewed and analyzed the proposed action as it relates to endangered species recovery planning for the San Francisco Bay estuary that is ongoing in this office. In that regard, we do not believe that the management actions proposed at the three proposed project sites in San Francisco Bay would affect or alter that planning effort provided that your office coordinates with the Recovery Branch of this office in identifying specific locations where proposed management actions would occur, especially at the Hayward Regional Shoreline and Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge sites.

Therefore, we concur with your determination that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the California clapper rail, salt marsh harvest mouse, delta smelt and its designated critical habitat, and western snowy plover and its proposed critical habitat. Unless new information reveals effects of the proposed action that may affect listed species in a manner or to an extent not considered, or a new species or critical habitat is designated that may be affected by the proposed action, no further action pursuant to the Act is necessary.

In closing, we note that the "Environmental Baseline" section on page 71 of the Biological Assessment is outdated and does not incorporate 2004 survey data for California clapper rails. We provide the following as information on this species to replace, at your discretion, the "Environmental Baseline" section currently on page 71 in the Biological Assessment.

The California clapper rail was listed as endangered primarily as a result of habitat loss. The factors described above have contributed to the more recent population reduction, which has occurred since the mid-1980s. Although many factors are at work, predation by native and non-native predators, in conjunction with historic habitat loss and fragmentation, are the current known primary threats. With historic populations at Humboldt Bay, Elkhorn Slough, and Morro Bay now extirpated, the San Francisco Estuary represents the last stronghold and breeding population of this subspecies.

Although Gill (1978) may have overestimated the total California clapper rail population in the mid-1970s at 4,200 to 5,900 birds, surveys conducted by the California Department of Fish and Game and the Service estimated that the California clapper rail population approximated 1,500 birds in the mid-1980s (Harvey 1988). In 1988, the total rail population was estimated to be 700 individuals, with 400 to 500 rails in south San

Francisco Bay (Foerster 1989). The total rail population reached an estimated all-time historical low of about 500 birds in 1991, with about 300 rails in south San Francisco Bay (Service unpubl. data). In response to predator management, the south San Francisco Bay rail population rebounded from this lowest population estimate to an estimated 650 to 700 individuals in 1997-98 (Service unpubl. data). Subsequently, the south San Francisco Bay population declined again the following year to about 500 individuals and remained at that level through early 2002 (Service unpubl. data). However, the south San Francisco Bay population declined further in 2002-2003 and was estimated to be 400-500 individuals (Service unpubl. data), which represented the lowest estimated population level in this area since the late 1980's and early 1990's. The south San Francisco Bay population apparently increased slightly in 2004 with the population estimated at 500 individuals (Service unpubl. data). A conservative estimate of the population in north San Francisco, San Pablo, and Suisun bays, was 195 to 282 pairs based on a synoptic survey conducted in 1992-93 (Collins *et al.* 1994). In 2004, Avocet Research Associates conducted surveys within San Pablo Bay and estimated about 200 pairs of California clapper rails in that area (Avocet Research Associates 2004). These surveys did not include some marshes in Suisun Bay and the northwestern portion of San Francisco Bay that were surveyed in 1992-93.

Please contact the Coast Bay Delta Branch Chief of my staff at (916) 414-6625, if you have questions regarding this memorandum.

Enclosure

LITERATURE CITED

- Avocet Research Associates. 2004. California clapper rail (*Rallus longirostris obsoletus*) breeding season survey San Pablo Bay and tributaries. Final Report to Marin Audubon Society. May 28, 2004 (Revised June 9, 2004). 17 pp. plus tables and maps.
- Collins, J.N., J.G. Evens, and B. Grewell. 1994. A synoptic survey of the distribution and abundance of the California clapper rail *Rallus longirostris obsoletus* in the northern reaches of the San Francisco Estuary during the 1992 and 1993 breeding seasons. Final report to California Department of Fish and Game. 22 pp. plus appendix.
- Forester, K.S. 1989. Summary of California clapper rail winter populations in the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Nov. 1988 to Jan. 1989. Unpubl. Report. San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.
- Gill, R., Jr. 1978. Status and distribution of the California clapper rail (*Rallus longirostris obsoletus*). 21 pp. plus appendix.
- Harvey, T.E. 1988. Breeding biology of the California clapper rail in south San Francisco Bay. 1988 Transactions of the Western Section of the Wildlife Society 24: 98-104.