



City of Woodland

REPORT TO MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

DATE: January 20, 2009

SUBJECT: Results of the 2008 Monitoring Report for the Spring Lake Specific
Plan Swainson's Hawk Mitigation

Report in Brief

Development of the Spring Lake Specific Plan (SLSP) Project created a requirement to mitigate for the loss of Swainson's hawk foraging habitat (SLSP Mitigation Monitoring Plan) and to conduct a fifteen-year biological monitoring program for Swainson's hawk habitat conservation easements. As part of the settlement (July 23, 2002 Settlement Agreement) for a lawsuit filed against the City as a result of its approval of the project, the City agreed to establish a Swainson's Hawk Biological Monitoring Program for the habitat conservation easements required for development of the SLSP. Since 2005, the City has contracted with H.T. Harvey & Associates to perform Swainson's hawk mitigation monitoring.

Staff recommends that the City Council receive the 2008 Monitoring Report for the Spring Lake Specific Plan Swainson's Hawk Mitigation. This report is for informational purposes and therefore no further action is required by the City Council.

Background

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) analysis of the SLSP identified the loss of Swainson's hawk foraging habitat. As a result, the SLSP Mitigation Monitoring Plan requires the purchase and establishment of habitat conservation easements to mitigate for the loss of the foraging habitat by the City as part of a legal settlement agreed to establish a Swainson's Hawk Biological Monitoring Program. The City's 2005 contract with H.T. Harvey for the Swainson's hawk biological monitoring covered the Merritt Ranch and Heidrick Property, where Swainson's hawk habitat conservation easements were purchased and established. Both areas are located south of the City. Merritt is generally bordered by County Road 27 on the north, State Highway 113 on the west, and Willow Slough on the south and east. Heidrick is south of County Road 27, bordered by Willow Slough on the west, north of County Road 29, and bordered by County Road 102 on the east.

The attached 2008 Monitoring Report details protocol-level biological monitoring conducted by an ornithologist of Swainson's hawks at the Heidrick and Merritt properties, as well as a study

monitoring foraging habitat of Swainson's hawk in the Willow Sough area. The purpose of the foraging habitat study is to assess foraging values of the Heidrick and Merritt properties for Swainson's hawks, and to compare these values with nearby land along Willow Slough to provide a context with which to assess the conservation values of the sites. The data collected on foraging habitat preferences in the region also provides valuable information regarding crop types for consideration for other Swainson's hawk conservation land in Yolo County.

Discussion

The study documented 274 observations of raptors, of which 204 were flying, 39 were perched adjacent to foraging habitat, 13 were standing on the ground, and 19 were roosting on or near nest trees. The observations of roosting birds were not included as foraging observations. The vast majority of observations were of Swainson's Hawks (96 percent), but also included a few observations of northern harrier, red-tailed hawk, and American kestrel. During all three years of the study, substantially greater numbers and densities of Swainson's hawks were observed in alfalfa as compared to all other crop types. The results of the study confirm what is widely accepted – that alfalfa is the primary foraging habitat, followed by tomato and other row crops, grassland and wheat. Alfalfa comprised approximately 34 percent of the available potential foraging habitat in the study area, yet 78 percent of the Swainson's hawk detections were associated with this crop.

On the Heidrick property in 2006, the study recorded six Swainson's hawk foraging observations, whereas in 2007 and 2008, the studies documented no observations. For the Merritt property, 23 observations were recorded in 2006, seven in 2007, and 16 in 2008.

Two pairs of Swainson's hawks were detected in 2008 along Willow Slough at locations where historic nesting has been documented within the Merritt and Heidrick properties. Each pair was documented to have successfully raised one young. Swainson's Hawks did not occupy a third historic nesting site just south of the project area or a fourth historic nesting site just north of the project area in 2008. There were no signs of Swainson's hawk mortality or injury, degradation or loss of riparian nesting habitat, or direct disturbance to nesting hawks.

Fiscal Impact

The City will not incur a fiscal impact as the SLSP Developers are funding the \$150,000 Swainson's Hawk Biological Monitoring Program as part of the Spring Lake Infrastructure Fee Program.

Public Contact

Posting of the City Council Agenda.

Recommendation for Action

Staff recommends that the City Council receive the 2008 Monitoring Report for the Spring Lake Specific Plan Swainson's Hawk Mitigation. This report is for informational purposes and therefore no further action is required by the City Council.

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Attachment: 2008 Monitoring Report for the Spring Lake Specific Plan Swainson's Hawk Mitigation