

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 8, 2010

TO: Ivy Edmonds-Hess
Parsons Brinckerhoff

FROM: Steve Granholm, Bird Monitoring Task Leader
LSA Associates, Inc.

FOR: California Department of Transportation

SUBJECT: Bird Monitoring Memo #412, Week of May 24 – 28, 2010
San Francisco – Oakland Bay Bridge East Span Project

PURSUANT TO: US Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion and California Department of Fish and Game Incidental Take Permit

Introduction

The California Department of Transportation (Department) is in the process of replacing the East Span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge (SFOBB) with a new bridge immediately to the north of the existing span (Figure 1). Construction of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge East Span Seismic Safety Project (SFOBB Project) is a multi-year effort that will involve a number of construction activities on land as well as in San Francisco Bay. Some of these activities could potentially affect federally and State endangered or threatened bird species and other bird species of special concern.

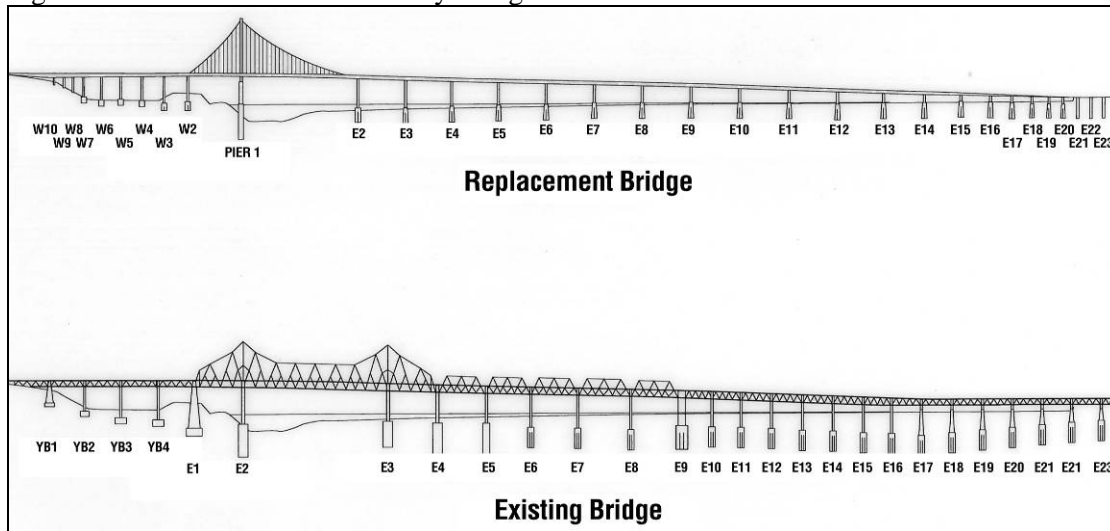
Figure 1. San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge Seismic Safety Project Location Map



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Biological Opinion (page 22) and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) Incidental Take Permit (Fully Protected Species Items 1 and 2 on pages 4 and 5) require monitoring of the California least tern and California brown pelican. The CDFG is also concerned about potential impacts to the American peregrine falcon and the double-crested cormorant and required a management plan for these species (Fully Protected Species Item 3 on page 5). In addition, the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge East Span Seismic Safety Project Final Environmental Impact Statement/Statutory Exemption and Final Section 4(f) Evaluation (FEIS) (page 4-130) requires that the Department monitor the double-crested cormorant colony and American peregrine falcon during the breeding season.

As required by the USFWS Biological Opinion and CDFG Incidental Take Permit, the monitoring efforts are focused primarily on three endangered species: the California least tern, California brown pelican, and American peregrine falcon. The primary objectives of these monitoring efforts are to minimize impacts to these three species and document any take of these species resulting from construction activities. In addition, monitoring is conducted to assess: 1) potential impacts to the behavior of American peregrine falcons and double-crested cormorants on the existing SFOBB East Span; 2) seasonal Canada goose activities along an exclusion fence built between a portion of the Emeryville Crescent and I-80; and 3) potential impacts on breeding activities of western gulls, which are known to nest on both the existing and new bridges (Figure 2). Monitoring is conducted in accordance with the *Final (Revised) Bird Monitoring and Management Plan* (Department, 2003). This plan incorporated the requirements of the USFWS, the CDFG, and the FEIS, as well as those of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) Permit No. 8-01, Special Condition F-6.

Figure 2. San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge Pier Locations



The bird monitors are required to conduct a survey once a week for three hours, if construction activities are underway. This memo summarizes the SFOBB Project bird monitoring activities conducted by LSA Associates (LSA) and Garcia and Associates (GANDA) during the week of May 24 – 28, 2010.

Bird Monitoring Activities

LSA conducted monitoring of the active construction areas from various land-based sites (the monitoring boat is currently being repaired), including the Oakland Touchdown (OTD), the Skyway, and Yerba Buena Island (YBI); GANDA conducted peregrine falcon monitoring from Pier W2 on YBI; and LSA conducted Canada goose monitoring from the Emeryville Crescent side of the goose exclusion fence along I-80.

Construction activities during the weekly bird survey included various activities at the OTD, South-South Detour, and Self-Anchored Suspension (SAS) construction sites, including load riveting on the temporary truss for the SAS; and crew boat traffic on San Francisco Bay. There were no construction activities during the peregrine falcon monitoring.

The weekly bird survey was conducted from 0815 to 0900, 0905 to 0945, and 1015 to 1250 hours on May 26, 2010. Peregrine falcon monitoring was conducted from 1230 to 1330 hours on May 28, 2010. Canada goose monitoring was conducted from 1315 to 1345 hours on May 26, 2010.

Results

Monitoring of Active Construction Areas

California Least Tern: No least terns were observed.

California Brown Pelican: No brown pelicans were observed.

Peregrine Falcon: At 1318 hours, a young peregrine falcon was observed in the nest site at existing Pier E2.

Double-crested Cormorant: Approximately 75 double-crested cormorants were observed. Sixty cormorants were under the existing bridge (including several carrying nesting material) and fifteen were flying or foraging in other parts of the study area. Cormorants on the existing bridge were observed from the Skyway, but due to the angle of the view, it was difficult to observe nests.

Western Gull: Approximately 17 western gulls were observed. Most were flying or resting on the existing bridge or the new bridge.

Observations of Additional Bird Species: The other bird species observed during the survey (and the approximate number of individuals) were Canada goose (15), western grebe or Clark's grebe (82), Brandt's cormorant (1), black-crowned night-heron (1), American kestrel (1), Caspian tern (2), pigeon guillemot (6), rock pigeon (8), common raven (1), barn swallow (1), European starling (2), California towhee (2), white-crowned sparrow (4), red-winged blackbird (1), and house finch (5).

Observations indicate that several pigeon guillemots may be nesting on the existing bridge. A pair was investigating a nook on top of the cement abutment on the existing bridge at OTD and four others were on and around the base of existing Pier E9 (one of these was perched on top of the cement structure in what appeared to be a suitable nest site).

American Peregrine Falcon Nest Monitoring

American peregrine falcon nests on the SFOBB East Span are monitored in addition to and separately from weekly bird monitoring in active construction areas. The peregrines are monitored at least weekly from December until the end of the peregrine nesting season. At the discretion of the lead peregrine falcon monitor, the survey frequency can be increased to as much as seven days a week for an active nest adjacent to active construction or demolition.

At the outset of the monitoring period on May 28, 2010, one juvenile was visible at the nest site at existing Pier E2, flapping its wings vigorously. An adult male peregrine falcon was perched on the hand rail located along the temporary truss structure and remained there for the duration of the monitoring period. Based on these and previous observations, the nestlings are nearing the fledging period, when they will take their first flight. The nestlings are expected to fledge on or about June 1, 2010.

Other Bird Species Observed: Other bird species observed during the peregrine monitoring were double-crested cormorant, western gull, and house finch. The peregrine monitor does not count the number of individuals of other bird species, because this activity would distract the monitor from watching for peregrine falcons.

Canada Goose Monitoring along the I-80 Roadway Adjacent to the Emeryville Crescent

Bird monitors are required to conduct Canada goose monitoring along the I-80 roadway adjacent to the Emeryville Crescent during March through August (Figure 3). The monitoring season may be extended through September or October, if warranted, based on the presence of geese that may be at risk. The monitoring objective is to assess the effectiveness of an 850-meter (2,800-foot) long fence that was designed to exclude Canada geese from entering the I-80 roadway.

Figure 3. Emeryville Crescent Goose Exclusion Fence



Thirteen Canada geese (9 adults and 4 young) were observed in the vicinity of the goose fence: seven adults were approximately 183 meters (600 feet) north of the “200 - 300 feet” marked fence interval and two adults and four young were approximately 152 meters (500 feet) north of the “2,100 – 2,200 feet” marked fence interval. These birds were on San Francisco Bay.

The goose fence was in good condition.

Conclusions

The monitors did not observe any indications that birds were disturbed due to SFOBB Project construction activities.

cc: Stefan Galvez, California Department of Transportation