



ALAMEDA COUNTY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

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Date: July 19, 2011
To: Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area Scientific Review Committee
From: Sandra Rivera, Assistant Deputy Director
Subject: Study Options

Recommendation: The Scientific Review Committee (SRC) discuss and consider the Study Options outlined in the memo and make a recommendation to staff.

Background

The SRC has recommended implementation of a Burrowing Owl pilot study to test the feasibility of conducting an observationally-based study of burrowing owl behavior to shed light on the high fatalities of burrowing owls in the Altamont (see P203—Burrowing Owls in the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area: Problem Statement and Hypothesis Testing Framework).

On a recent conference call to discuss and revise the final work plan for this pilot study, former SRC member Shawn Smallwood and representatives of the wind companies proposed that instead of funding the pilot study, the County fund an effort to digitize the last 18 months of bird use and attribute (behavior) data that have not yet been digitized.

The outcome of this discussion was that the County would convene a follow-up call to allow for a more focused discussion of the various options for proceeding with one study or the other, or other options, and would prepare a matrix of options for SRC consideration at their July 21-22 meeting.

The County convened a conference call on July 15th, with the following outcomes:

Key Outcomes

1. Digitizing use and behavior data – 2010 to present

Discussion

Shawn Smallwood has digitized all available bird use data from the end of 2006 through December 2009. Behavior data, collected for the first monitoring year, has also been digitized. The bird use and behavior data are in the process of being reviewed for QA/QC by Smallwood's team and will be finalized soon.

For reference, bird use data has been continuously collected during the current study while behavior data had been collected during the first year of monitoring, and then again starting in July 2010 through the present.

The County asked both Shawn Smallwood and the Monitoring Team to outline a proposal to fund digitization of the past years' worth of behavior data and the last 18 months of use data. Smallwood estimated the cost of completing the QA/QC of the 2005-2009 data and digitizing the available use and behavior data to be \$7,000, plus copying cost. The digitization would be completed in two months. Doug Leslie, Monitoring Team, recommended that the County retain Smallwood to continue the digitization of the use and behavior data at the stated cost proposal. Leslie stated the \$7,000 cost could be available and managed through the ICF contract.

Time Sensitivity: There is an immediate need. There is interest in utilizing any flight information available from any time period to aid in modeling for raptor risk. The digitization of the use and behavior data would be used by Smallwood to develop a model for siting NextEra's repowered turbines.

Outcome: Shawn and his group will complete the QA/QC of the use (2005-2009) and behavior data (2005 only), as well as, digitize and QA/QC the 2010- 2011 bird use and behavior data this summer.

2. Burrowing Owl Pilot Study

Discussion

It was determined that the minimal cost of the digitizing effort would not preclude going forward with the pilot study, from a funding standpoint.

3. Emerging Burrowing Owl Distribution and Abundance Study results

Discussion

Shawn Smallwood shared some preliminary results from the Distribution and Abundance surveys that suggest some unexpected findings. He recommended another study option -- continue the Burrowing Owl Distribution and Abundance study. He stated that ongoing sampling could yield additional critical information about BO use into the fall and winter months which would be useful for modeling raptor risk for repowering.

Doug Leslie suggested that the pilot study design could be implemented at any time in the year. Others reiterated SRC member Julie Yee's point regarding high BO fatalities in the winter months and the suggestion that the pilot be carried out in the winter. The group discussed the option and agreed this was new information that needed to be brought to the SRC for formal consideration

Outcome: Study Options for SRC consideration at its meeting on July 21-22, 2011.

Study	Rationale	Time Frame	Estimated Cost
1. Digitizing remaining use and behavior data	Assist in modeling raptor risk for siting of new turbines	Immediate	\$7,000
2. BO Behavior Pilot Study	Establish feasibility of gaining useful observational data	One month, any time in the year	\$43,000
3. Continue BO distribution and abundance surveys into the fall	Track unexpected findings coming out of first 3 months of the D&A Study	August - September	\$32, 000

Shawn Smallwood will proceed with digitizing the remaining use and behavior data (Study 1).

Option 1: Proceed with the BO pilot study now.

Option 2: Continue the BO Distribution and Abundance surveys through the fall (pending a proposal from Smallwood).

Next Steps

After discussing and reviewing the preliminary BO Distribution and Abundance study results, consider the study options and make a recommendation.