

SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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Bay Area Water Trail Meeting on Rafting Birds

Tuesday, July 11, 2006

11:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.

Attendees:

Ann Buell, Coastal Conservancy
Susan De La Cruz, Wildlife Biologist,
USGS, SF Estuary Field Station
David Dolberg, Bay Access
Jules Evens, Principal, Avocet Research
Associates (via phone)

Arthur Feinstein, Citizens Committee to
Complete the Refuge
Joe LaClair, BCDC
Jim McGrath, Bay Access
Sara Polgar, BCDC
Barbara Salzman, Marin Audubon Society
(via phone)

Summary:

A handful of data sources on rafting bird populations in San Francisco Bay were identified.

1. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) annual aerial survey in January.
2. U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) monthly aerial surveys during winter; data for 2004-2005, 2005-2006 winters. A third year of data will be gathered during the 2006-2007 winter. Funded by the Water Transit Authority; range covers entire Bay (but not Suisun Bay); data include species, number of birds and UTM for each observation; uses same transect as USFWS survey.
3. USGS telemetry data sets to measure site fidelity, winter movement and foraging areas of Greater and Lesser Scaup and Surf Scoter; data collection began in 1998; range is San Pablo Bay.
4. USGS semi-monthly aerial surveys; data for winters (October-April) 1988-1989 and 1989-1990; range covers entire Bay including Suisun Bay; data include species and densities. (L. Acurso thesis.)
5. USGS on-shore surveys around the Bay; conducted in the late 1980's and will be repeated at many of the same sites in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005.
6. Study done for airport expansion in Central Bay; (Jules mentioned this).
7. Onshore grid surveys of rafts; (Jules mentioned this).
8. Ruth Pratt's baylands study.
9. Birds of North America-National Population numbers (Jules mentioned this)

From these, Susan suggested that the aerial surveys are most useful to the trail for identifying high-density rafting areas near launches that need management intervention. However, after the next winter, the only ongoing, annual data source will be the FWS January survey.

We also came up with ideas for how future Water Trail staff should address this issue:

1. Use the Water Trail website as a way to inform trail users about the most up-to-date conditions and areas to avoid to prevent disturbance.
2. Plan and coordinate a volunteer-based data collection effort (shoreline-based).
3. Organize/train kayakers to identify where rafts of birds are located and to convey this information to trail staff and site managers, possibly website manager.
4. Assess the existing launch sites for usage by non-motorized small boaters and rafting birds. Do this by creating GIS layers that depict a 'prototypical year': monthly usage by rafting birds with launch sites and usage levels.
5. Include "ongoing steps" in the Water Trail plan that describe a process for the trail staff to stay up to date on information on rafting birds and then use these data to make management decisions.
6. Seek out opportunities to obtain funding and other resources for future research on rafting birds in the Bay.

7. For trail heads that are developed through public funds, establish a protocol or processes for implementing management, outreach and education efforts at the site and maintaining these long-term.
8. Develop a volunteer water docent program for outreach, education and monitoring

Last, there were suggestions to form a partnership among Bay Access, the Audubon Society and Save the Bay to collaboratively develop a trail-wide environmental education and outreach program and seek funding for further research to answer key management-related questions.