



August 8, 2014

Emma Becton
EB Realty
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Email: becton1@sbcglobal.net

Re: Burrowing owl habitat assessment/survey for 2350 Harbor Bay Parkway, Alameda, California

Dear Ms. Becton:

This letter provides the results of a habitat assessment and survey for burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) at 2350 Harbor Bay Parkway (Study Area), Alameda, Alameda County, California.

Study Area description

The Study Area is a piece of undeveloped land approximately 1.6 acres in size along Harbor Bay Parkway, in the Bay Farm Island portion of the City of Alameda (Figure 1, attached); photographs of the Study Area are provided in Attachment 2. The Study Area is bounded by Harbor Bay Parkway and adjacent urban development to the north, east and southeast, urban parkland to the south, San Francisco Bay shoreline to the west, and a very small, linear section of urban parkland to the northwest. The vast majority of the Study Area contains open ground that was disked fairly recently, although patches of weeds and volunteer shrubbery have grown up in several areas, with an isolated patch of willows (*Salix* sp.) present roughly in the center of the site. Urban landscaping in the form of shrubs and trees is present along much of the Study Area's periphery. The general vicinity of the Study Area is characterized by urban development and includes commercial buildings and transportation corridors, including a paved pedestrian shoreline path. Human activity in the immediate area appears to occur habitually, including jogging, bicycling and dog-walking (all observed during the survey). Additionally, the Study Area is located below a primary flight course for aircraft taking off from nearby Oakland International Airport (also observed during the survey).

Burrowing owl background

The burrowing owl is a California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW, formerly Department of Fish and Game) Species of Special Concern, as well as a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Bird of Conservation Concern. This species inhabits open areas with sparse or non-existent tree or shrub canopies; typical habitat is annual or perennial grassland, although human-modified areas such as agricultural land and airports are also used. Burrowing owls are dependent on burrowing mammals to provide the burrows that are characteristically used for shelter and nesting. In northern California, owls are typically found in close association with California ground squirrels (*Spermophilus beecheyi*). Manmade substrates such as pipes or debris piles

may also be occupied in place of burrows. In the San Francisco Bay area, the species is both a winter visitor and a year-round resident; individuals of the latter group generally show strong site fidelity. The greater nesting period is from February through July.

Prior to conducting the survey, CDFW's Natural Diversity Database and eBird.com (a publicly-accessible online bird observation database) were searched to determine the nearest documented burrowing owl occurrence(s). According to the Natural Diversity Database, the nearest documented occurrence is approximately 0.8 mile to the southeast of the Study Area, and dated from 1983 (apparently before much of the current development on Bay Farm Island). The nearest eBird observation is approximately 1.2 miles to the north along the Bay Farm Island Shoreline; this observation occurred in 2012, and was apparently of a wintering individual.

Methods

Survey methodology was informed by guidelines developed by the Burrowing Owl Consortium and adopted by CDFW, corresponding both to both a habitat assessment and a burrow/burrowing owl survey as described in the updated 2012 protocol¹. The survey was conducted by WRA wildlife biologist Jason Yakich on August 7, 2014, from 7:20 AM to 8:40 AM. The Study Area and surrounding, accessible areas within 250 feet were traversed on foot to determine the general suitability for burrowing owl, to locate burrows (or other suitable substrates), and to search for owls or sign of their presence. Burrowing owl sign consists of feathers, regurgitated pellets and/or whitewash (feces stains), and is typically found near the entrances to occupied burrows; foraging perches often show these characteristics as well. All burrows (and any comparable, potential refugia) found were carefully examined for signs of burrowing owl occupation.

Results

No burrowing owls or indication of this species' presence was observed during the site visit. Although no ground squirrels were observed, burrows presumably created by this species were present both within and adjacent to the Study Area. Specifically, approximately 30 burrows were located within the Study Area itself and 22 burrows were located along its southwestern periphery within patches of landscape shrubbery and along the upper edge of the shoreline rip-rap. Approximately four burrows were also noted in the parkland area to the southeast of the Study Area. Virtually all burrows within the Study Area were dilapidated and/or featured entrances covered by cobwebs, indicating no recent use by burrowing owls (or squirrels). Most of the peripheral burrows were in a similar state, although several appeared to be relatively maintained and potentially used recently by squirrels. However, these latter burrows were located at the bases of or otherwise directly adjacent to shrubs several feet in height, indicating that burrowing owls would be unlikely to use them due to visual obstructions surrounding the burrow entrances. All burrows observed during the site visit (both within and adjacent to the Study Area) were carefully examined for any indication of burrowing owl presence, and none was observed.

WRA concludes that no burrowing owls are currently presently within or adjacent to the Study Area. Additionally, the site provides only poor-quality habitat for the following reasons:

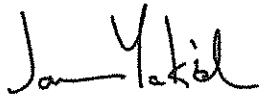
¹ "Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation." California Department of Fish and Game. March 7, 2012.

- The Study Area has been disked fairly recently, rendering burrow construction and maintenance (by squirrels or other mammals) difficult, if not infeasible.
- The Study Area is relatively small in area and surrounded by landscaping (shrubs and trees) that limit visibility at ground-level and thus discourage use by burrowing owls.
- Ambient conditions within the Study Area and its immediate vicinity are characterized by urban development and associated proximate disturbances (automobile traffic, joggers and dog-walkers), further discouraging occupation of the site by owls.

While the Study Area and surrounds appear to lack the potential to support year-round burrowing owl occupation (including breeding), there is some limited potential for burrowing owl wintering to occur at the site. Burrowing owls have been documented to winter (roughly from September through April) in marginal, urban habitat areas in the vicinity of San Francisco Bay. For this reason, WRA recommends that a follow-up pre-construction survey ("take avoidance survey" as described in the CDFW protocol) be conducted within 14 days of initial ground disturbance within the Study Area. This survey would consist of simply surveying the handful of intact mammal burrows present within and adjacent to the site. If burrowing owls (or any indication of this species' presence) is observed within or adjacent to the Study Area, consultation with the CDFW is strongly recommended prior to the initiation of any project activities.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like additional information or have questions about any of these survey efforts and recommendations.

Sincerely,



Jason Yakich
Wildlife Biologist

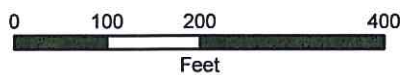
Attachments:

1. Figure 1
2. Site photographs



Figure 1. Study Area Location Map

2350 Harbor Bay Parkway
Alameda, Alameda County, California



Map Date: August 2014
Map By: Derek Chan
Base Source: ESRI/National Geographic

Attachment 2. Site photographs



Top: Study Area, facing southeast from northern boundary.

Bottom: Study Area, facing northwest from southern boundary.

Photographs taken August 7, 2014.



Attachment 2. Site photographs



Top: Old/dilapidated ground squirrel burrow within the Study Area.

Bottom: Ground squirrel burrows along shoreline adjacent to Study Area.

Photographs taken August 7, 2014.

