



January 15, 2018

Vijay Patel
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Re: Burrowing owl habitat assessment/survey for 1051 & 1047 Harbor Bay Blvd., Alameda, California - 2018

Dear Mr. Patel:

This letter provides the results of a habitat assessment and survey for burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) at 1051 and 1047 Harbor Bay Boulevard (Study Area), in Alameda, Alameda County, California. WRA provided a previous assessment for the Study Area in December 2015, with the results summarized in a letter dated December 15, 2015; this present assessment updates those previous findings.

Study Area Description

The Study Area is a piece of undeveloped land approximately 2.4 acres in size along Harbor Bay Boulevard¹, in the Bay Farm Island portion of the City of Alameda (Figure 1, Attachment 1); representative photographs of the Study Area are provided in Attachment 2. The Study Area is bounded by Harbor Bay Blvd. to the east, Harbor Bay Blvd./Ron Cowan Parkway to the south, and urban/commercial development to the west and north. The majority of the Study Area contains open ground and sparse ruderal grasses up to three inches in height. The perimeter of the Study Area consists of ice plant (*Aizoaceae* sp.), pampas grass (*Cortaderia* sp.), and various non-native ornamental trees (primarily acacias [*Acacia* sp.]) up to 30 feet in height. The general vicinity of the Study Area is characterized by urban development and landscaped areas, and includes commercial buildings and transportation corridors (e.g., paved pedestrian path and sidewalks).

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

¹ This road is referred to as Harbor Bay Parkway by some sources, e.g., Google Maps.

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 in the latter group generally show strong site fidelity. The greater statewide 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 0.5 mile to the southwest of the Study Area, and dated from 1983 (apparently before much of the current development on Bay Farm Island) (CDFW 2018).² The nearest eBird observation is approximately 1.3 and miles to the northeast along Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline; and occurred on January 1, 2018 (eBird 2018).³ There are no recorded observations within or immediately adjacent to the Study Area.

Methods

Survey methodology was informed by guidelines developed by the Burrowing Owl Consortium and adopted by CDFW, corresponding to both a habitat assessment and a burrow/burrowing owl survey as described in the updated 2012 protocol.⁴ The survey was conducted by WRA wildlife biologist Molly Brewer on January 3, 2018, from 9:15 AM to 10:30 AM. The Study Area was 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. Accessible areas within 250 feet of the Study Area were also examined for sign of burrowing owl, including the adjacent land parcel, medians, and landscaped areas along roads and sidewalks. The land to west of the Study Area was not considered during this habitat assessment and survey, as it consists primarily of parking lots and business complexes.

Results and Discussion

As was the case for the previous assessment in 2015, no burrowing owls or indication of this species' presence was observed during the site visit. Additionally, no ground squirrels or mammal burrows of suitable size were observed within or adjacent to the Study Area. There were multiple debris piles within the Study Area that could potentially serve as lower-quality refugia for burrowing owls if suitably-sized burrows are not available. However, there was no indication of burrowing owls utilizing the debris.

² California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). 2018. California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB), Wildlife and Habitat Data Analysis Branch. Sacramento, CA. Accessed: January 2018.

³ eBird. 2018. eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Ithaca, New York. Available: <http://www.ebird.org>. Accessed: January 2018.

⁴ "Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation." California Department of Fish and Game. March 7, 2012.

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

- Suitable burrows that could be occupied by burrowing owls are absent.
- The Study Area is relatively small in area and surrounded by development and 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.

As such, burrowing owls are unlikely to occupy the site in the near future unless site conditions are altered (e.g., ground squirrels colonize the site).

Please contact me if you would like additional information or have questions about this report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason Yakich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jason" and last name "Yakich" clearly distinguishable.

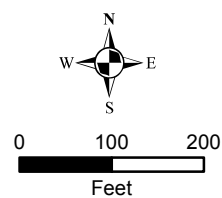
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Enclosures: Attachment 1 - Figure 1
Attachment 2 - Site Photographs



Figure 1. Study Area Location Map

1051 & 1047 Harbor Bay Blvd.
Alameda, Alameda County, California



Map Date: January 2013
Map By: Derek Chan
Base Source: ESRI/National Geographic



Photo 1. View of Study Area, facing north.



Photo 2. View of the southwestern portion of the Study Area, facing south.



Photo 3. Sidewalk on eastern edge of Study Area.