

Environmental

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Project Title: Central Valley Swainson's Hawk Research

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Central Valley Swainson's Hawk Research

There is a need for guidance and Best Management Practices for Caltrans Biologists and Engineers to use for the protection of Swainson's Hawk, which is a protected species, when present at construction sites.

WHAT IS THE NEED?

This research is needed to guide conversations, when discussing appropriate Swainson's Hawk (SWHA) protective and mitigation measures with internal and external partners. There is a need for guidance and Best Management Practices (BMP) for the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Biologists and Construction to use for the protection of SWHA when present. Guidance and BMP's will be based on predictive modeling tools developed using the best available science and data gathered during this research. This will reduce delays to the construction schedule and associated increases in construction costs.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

This research proposal proposes to determine how SWHA respond to our construction activities. Monitors would collect data from sites chosen to represent a variety of project types, environmental settings and SWHA nesting activity. Control sites would be used for statistical comparison. The data would be analyzed to determine whether SWHA change their behavior because of construction activities. If there is a statistical correlation, we would identify which factors cause the greatest change. Conclusions made from the data gathered will be used to develop a predictive model, guidance for avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures, BMP's and SSP's.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

The goal is to have a peer reviewed, published study available to others and to Caltrans to develop guidance for avoidance,



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minimization and mitigation measures, BMP's, and updated construction Standard Special Provisions.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

Another desired outcome is that this information will be used when determining appropriate SWHA protective and mitigation measures both internally and with external partners like California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). The data collected will inform both the Caltrans project delivery process and mitigation process. Guidance would be made available to all staff in the Environmental Division via the Standard Environmental Reference. Standard Special Provisions would be updated as needed. Collaboration and partnerships between Caltrans and other State and federal agencies will improve future project planning and identification of mitigation needs earlier in the Caltrans Project Delivery Process. This will allow for more effective negotiations with resource agencies and implementation of mitigation strategies that may reduce construction costs and schedules.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

A research team from University of California Los Angeles has been selected and the project started on April 2024. The research team and the customer from Caltrans District 10 have been working to submit an application for Incidental Take Permit (ITP) following a recommendation by CDFW. Since there was no adequate time to secure an ITP for Caltrans construction projects and start the field studies as planned and complete the project on time, the research team and the research panel opted to work on construction projects under High-Speed Rail that have ITPs already. CDFW then approved that plan and all field studies are now completed with the research team successfully tagging 18 birds, and collecting all the necessary telemetry data as planned. The team is currently analyzing the data and preparing the draft final report.