

**NOTES | 7/9/2014 Conference Call****Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area Scientific Review Committee**

Prepared by the Center for Collaborative Policy

Reviewed and approved by the SRC

**All 5 SRC Members Present****Discussion Topics**

- **SRC Input on Draft Repowering Program Environmental Impact Report**
- **NextEra Burrowing Owl Studies Update**
- **Background Mortality Special Study Design**

**Next In-Person Meeting**

February-May 2015

**Action Items**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
Julie Yee	Prior to July 21	Report back on how USGS approach to SRC input on TAC composition
SRC	ASAP	Inform facilitator if additional SRC discussion/conference call needed on DPEIR
SRC	July 16 if possible	Review latest version of P289 SRC Comments on DPEIR, edit for typos/clarity
CCP	July 21 at latest	Submit final P289 SRC Comments document to Alameda County
MT/Background Mortality Subcommittee	As needed	Meet to continue development of background mortality study and design
ICF	Prior to Oct.	Will arrange for conference call if significant change or new item in background mortality study plan; will otherwise update as needed by email
Alameda County/ICF	When known	Update SRC on Board of Supervisors decision on 2014-15 background mortality study
CCP	Sept.	Poll SRC on availability for February-April in-person meeting; work with Shawn Smallwood early to identify availability and agenda item format/logistics

**SRC Consensus Input on Repowering Draft Program Environmental Impact Report****Related Documents**[P285 Alameda County Memo on Questions for Repowering DPEIR Review](#)[P287 Draft Repowering Program Environmental Impact Report](#)

[P288 ICF DPEIR Presentation Slides](#)

[P289 SRC Comments on Draft Repowering Program EIR](#)

### **Introduction/Background**

At the June SRC meeting, Alameda County's consultant, ICF, provided an overview of the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for repowering in the APWRA and received initial SRC input. Since that meeting, individual SRC members developed their comments on the PEIR, which were collected and publicized in the document P289 SRC Comments on Draft Repowering Program EIR. The objective of the conference call discussion was for the SRC to reach consensus on its group input on the PEIR's methods, assumptions, and proposed mitigation measures relative to avian impacts.

### **SRC Discussion**

An SRC member asked why ICF included a decommissioning alternative if repowering is a program objective. Chris Brungardt of ICF, said consultants want to consider that option even though it did not satisfy that particular objective.

Several SRC members supported submitting the individual comments as a consensus document, with comments reorganized by PEIR topic.

Several SRC members suggested prioritizing certain issues for the consensus document. The individual comments contained several common themes including baseline justification, species list, Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) composition, support for members to attend, and mitigation specificity.

An SRC member said she needed to confer with her employer regarding possible constraints against joining in comments on TAC composition, as it might be considered a policy rather than science issue.

SRC members elaborated on some of their individual comments in response to an SRC member's clarifying questions.

An SRC member suggested adding two potential bias statements on page 3.4-54:

- 1) An integrated detection probability trials design (e.g., Vasco Winds project) would be preferable to outdated detection probabilities (Monitoring Program QAQC detection probabilities), and
- 2) The search radius around larger turbines may be a potential unknown bias, because the appropriate search radii are not well-understood.

An SRC member said ICF should elaborate on why the method for selecting the baseline is a good approach, because it seems unusual to require mitigation even if impacts fall below the baseline. Chris Brungardt said the standard California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process is to select the baseline as the existing conditions when the agency files its Notice of Preparation (NOP), which is at a time when old-generation turbines are operating and causing avian fatalities. However, ICF sought to acknowledge the impacts below the baseline.

In response to an SRC member's question, Sally Zeff and Chris Brungardt, ICF, explained that under CEQA, alternatives are compared to the baseline, while the No Project Alternative is what ICF expects will occur if the repowering program does not proceed. ICF will further elaborate on the alternatives process in the final PEIR.

Several SRC members said ICF should either use the rolling average for avian mortality or clarify the potential bias of ICF's preferred approach of using mortality averaged across 2005-2011. Several SRC members suggested that perhaps both approaches should be used and compared. This approach most likely increases the baseline because it includes years before management actions to reduce avian mortality were implemented.

An SRC member said some mitigation measures seem unnecessary because current turbine designs already include mitigation components. Chris Brungardt said the mitigation measures are precautionary in case future turbine designs revert to historically hazardous features.

In response to an SRC member's question, Chris Brungardt said seasonal shutdown could potentially be a curtailment option, but the specific shutdown design is unknown because of varied turbine types.

### **Public Comment**

There were no comments from the public.

### **SRC Consensus on Comments on the Repowering Draft PEIR**

1. The SRC agreed that the individual comments were similar and represented SRC views.
2. Individual SRC comments should be submitted as a compiled, consensus document for the PEIR public review, subject to reorganization by topic, minor clarification edits, and the possible exception of the TAC composition comments, pending clarification from Julie Yee.
3. The SRC agreed that while all individual comments require responses, certain issues deserve more attention (i.e., baseline issues, species list, and mitigation specificity).

### **Next Steps**

- Julie Yee will report back on whether she can join in SRC input on TAC composition.
- CCP will update P289 per SRC input and recirculate among SRC for clarifying edits.
- CCP will submit the final version of P289 to Alameda County and ICF by July 21.

### **Update on NextEra Burrowing Owl-Related Studies**

Renee Culver of NextEra provided an update on Shawn Smallwood's nocturnal burrowing owl behavioral study at the Sandhill site (September 2012 – June 2014). The goal of the study is to integrate night-time behavior into risk models for siting turbines. The study surveyed old-generation turbines at 12 stations consistently, and 18 other stations (frequency unknown). Shawn Smallwood has not yet analyzed all the data, but has 330 hours of observations and anecdotal evidence that burrowing owls hunt behaviorally like kestrels (but at night).

### **SRC Discussion**

The SRC expressed the desire for a report (written or oral), when available. In response to SRC questions, Ms. Culver said surveys occurred year-round, but she is unaware of any seasonal differences. She had anecdotal evidence of foxes and other scavengers flushing burrowing owls, a burrowing owl hitting and recovering from colliding with a turbine tower, and other owl species occurring near turbine pads. She expects to receive a summary report.

Several SRC members requested that Shawn Smallwood present his findings at a future in-person meeting.

### **Public Comment**

There were no comments from the public.

### **Next Steps:**

- CCP to coordinate with Shawn Smallwood on presenting his studies' findings at the next SRC in-person meeting.

## **Review of Proposed Background Mortality Special Study Design**

### **Related Documents**

[M105 Background Mortality Draft Study Plan](#)

### **Background**

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors instructed County staff to limit the 2014-15 avian fatality monitoring program to \$250,000. Additionally, several repowering projects will likely begin in spring 2015. Given these budget and time constraints, the SRC discussed several potential studies and their benefits, and they ultimately recommended a focused background mortality study on non-turbine-related fatalities. At the June SRC in-person meeting, the SRC agreed that the Monitoring Team would continue to develop the project study design with the aid of an analysis subcommittee, comprised of SRC members Mike Morrison and Julie Yee and Monitoring Team leader Doug Leslie. The goal of the agenda item was for the SRC to review and discuss the draft study design.

### **Introduction**

Doug Leslie reviewed the results of the feasibility analysis, which focused on burrowing owl fatalities and estimated the level of effort necessary to achieve an acceptable statistical power.

### **SRC Discussion**

SRC members and Monitoring Team members Doug Leslie and Brian Karas discussed the optimal time period for the focused study, given constraints. The initial study design proposed conducting most of the fieldwork during winter shutdown, plus one month before and after (i.e., October 1 – March 30). However, conducting the entire study only during the seasonal shutdown would potentially allow for greater statistical power and survey frequency, at the cost of losing before/after treatment analyses. October would still require a clearing search. Brian Karas suggested conducting surveys in March for carcasses that might be backdated to the seasonal shutdown period.

An SRC member suggested another treatment: turning some turbines on during the seasonal shutdown to compare fatalities at operating vs. non-operating turbines. A few SRC members and a Monitoring Team member expressed concern over decreased statistical power if the study increases the number of treatments. The SRC and Monitoring Team agreed the study design should not include this additional treatment.

The SRC and Monitoring Team also discussed the challenge of selecting matched sites to compare fatalities with or without turbines. Shawn Smallwood may have relevant mapping information on identifying ideal burrowing owl habitat, but participants were uncertain whether that information was available or current. Doug Leslie said the subcommittee recommended a gradient design if a matched pair design would not work. A few SRC members suggested site selection should prioritize sites with high densities of burrowing owls. Doug Leslie said if the Monitoring Team cannot find sufficient sites, it will not proceed with the background mortality study.

### **Public Comment**

Renee Culver of NextEra made the following comments:

- She suggested presenting the focused study design to the Board of Supervisors sooner rather than later to retain experienced Monitoring Team searchers.
- Site selection should consider burrowing owl density.
- Turning turbines on during the seasonal shutdown period would pose significant permit challenges.

### **SRC Recommendations on the Proposed Background Mortality Study Design**

1. The analysis subcommittee should further explore the background mortality study design, specifically the appropriate study period and experimental design.
2. The SRC will need another conference call if the analysis subcommittee proposes a significant change to the study design, such as turning turbines on during the shutdown period.
3. County staff and the Monitoring Team should submit the study proposal for Board of Supervisors approval as soon as possible.

### **Next Steps**

- The Monitoring Team will continue to develop the study design in conjunction with the analysis subcommittee.
- The Monitoring Team will keep the SRC informed regarding the study design. If there is a significant proposed design change, an SRC conference call meeting will be held.
- Sandra Rivera will update the SRC on the Board of Supervisors' decision for the 2014-15 avian monitoring program special study.

## **Wrap Up and Next Steps**

### **Next Steps**

- CCP will poll the SRC in early fall for availability for the next in-person meeting, expected in the February-May 2015 timeframe.

**Next In-person Meeting:** February-May 2015

**Tentative Topics:**

- Review draft 2005-2013 Monitoring Report
- Update on Background Mortality Special Study
- Update on NextEra burrowing owl studies by Shawn Smallwood

**ATTENDEES**

**SRC**

Joanna Burger  
Jim Estep  
Michael Morrison  
Sue Orloff  
Julie Yee

**Consultants**

Doug Leslie  
Brian Karas  
Chris Brungardt, ICF  
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**Identified Public**

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