

Appendix F

Memorandum Regarding California Clapper Rail, California Black Rail, and California Least Tern



Memorandum

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From: Matt Gause, WES (mgause@westervelt.com)

cc: Rob Capriola, WES
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Subject: Tule Red: California clapper rail, California black rail, and California least tern

The Suisun Marsh Plan contains various environmental commitments regarding California clapper rail, California black rail, and California least tern. WES has been conducting field work and surveys at the Tule Red project site since purchase of the property in 2010. Numerous bird species have been observed incidental to other work; however, no California clapper rail, California black rail, or California least tern have been observed during field work conducted the last 5 years. WES has not conducted any surveys for these species following CDFW protocol; however, we do not believe these species are present at the project site for the following reasons; therefore, surveys should not be necessary to document species absence.

California Clapper Rail and California Black Rail

1. The following information about California clapper rail and California black rail is found Section 6.3, Wildlife, in the Suisun Marsh Plan.

California clapper rails occur in tidal saline and brackish sloughs and tidal wetlands (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1984) typically dominated by pickleweed and other halophytic species. Clapper rails are most often found in larger marshes and close to other large marshes and prefer marshes with established vegetative cover. Habitat that has direct tidal circulation, abundant high marsh cover, and an intricate network of tidal sloughs that provide abundant invertebrate populations is preferred. Other factors that affect rail use of tidal wetlands are inundation regime, access to high ground refugia, salinity, and vegetation communities (Conceptual Model 2010).

In the study area, the California clapper rail historically has been restricted to the western, more saline portions of Suisun Marsh. The intertidal zone may provide marginal foraging habitat for California clapper rail. The low and middle tidal wetland zones may be used for foraging and refugial habitat. High tidal wetland zones provide optimal foraging, refugial, and nesting habitat. The upland transition

zone provides escape cover from high tides (Conceptual Model 2010). Nests are located in dense wetland vegetation and are constructed off the ground and above the high tide elevation. The nests typically are constructed of cordgrass or other vegetation and are capped with vegetation (Lewis and Garrison 1983).

California black rails occur along tidal sloughs, brackish marsh, and tidal wetlands and typically occur in marshes dominated by pickleweed or low-growing forms of bulrush (Manolis 1978). California black rails are associated with habitat features representative of mature, well-developed marshes. Black rails most often are found in larger marshes and close to other large marshes.

California black rails require high marshes with moist soil and shallow water. Other factors that affect black rail use of tidal wetlands are inundation regime and marsh geomorphology, stable water levels that seldom flood, dense stands of low growing vegetation, and access to high-ground refugia (Conceptual Model 2010).

Diked marshes do not appear to provide suitable breeding habitat, possibly because they have lower food resource levels than tidal wetlands (Manolis 1978). California black rail nests are located in the high marsh zone and occasionally the upper limits of the middle marsh zone above the limits of tidal inundation. Nests are constructed of loosely placed vegetation concealed in dense marsh vegetation.

2. Figure 15 of the Suisun Marsh Plan identifies levees affected by California clapper rail restrictions. None of the levees on the project site or near the project site are identified as being affected by restrictions.

Based on our years of experience at the site, and our review of the California clapper rail and California black rail habitat needs, we do not believe protocol level surveys are required for the following reasons:

1. Our site is managed marsh with no direct tidal circulation and no network of tidal sloughs.
2. Our site is actively managed throughout the year. Water levels are managed at a constant level throughout the fall and winter of each year. Water levels are drawn down beginning in early February, and the marsh plain soils and vegetation will begin to dry out at the beginning of summer. Various portions of the site are mowed and disced every year in the summer and early fall.
3. Our site is on the east side of Grizzly Bay while the Suisun Marsh Plan states that California clapper rail historically has been restricted to the western, more saline portions of Suisun Marsh.

California Least Tern

1. The following information about California least tern is found Section 6.3, Wildlife, in the Suisun Marsh Plan.

(California least tern) nests consist of shallow scrapes in sand or fine substrate gravel with sparse vegetation near open water along coastal beaches and estuaries (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1985).

Based on our years of experience at the site, and our review of the California least tern habitat needs, we do not believe surveys are required for the following reasons:

1. Our site is managed marsh. Although we do have sparse vegetation, we do not have any sandy areas or areas with fine gravel substrate.
2. As stated above, our site is actively managed throughout the year. Water levels are managed at a constant level throughout the fall and winter of each year. Water levels are drawn down beginning in early February, and the marsh plain soils and vegetation will begin to dry out at the beginning of summer. Various portions of the site are mowed and disced every year from July to September.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I can be reached at mgause@westervelt.com or (916) 216-7953.

