



City of Santa Barbara
Airport Department

DATE: September 17, 2014
TO: Airport Commission
FROM: Hazel Johns, Airport Director
SUBJECT: Wildlife Hazard Assessment (WHA) and Wildlife Hazard Management Plan (WHMP) Update

RECOMMENDATION:

That Airport Commission receive a staff report on the Federal Aviation Administration, Airport Improvement Program planning grant for a Wildlife Hazard Assessment and Wildlife Hazard Management Plan Update.

DISCUSSION:

On September 9, 2014 the Airport Department signed a grant agreement with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for \$125,389, to fund 90.66% of the cost of completing a Wildlife Hazard Assessment (WHA) and an update to the Airport's Wildlife Hazard Management Plan (WHMP).

A WHA is a year-long review of wildlife behavior and attractants both on the Airport and within a 5-mile radius. Wildlife biologists will visit 20 location on and off the Airport roughly every two weeks for 26 weeks (at randomized times) to count and indentify wildlife (with particular attention to birds). The result of the WHA will inform the update of the WHMP which may include revisions to existing procedures or propose new projects or programs to minimize wildlife strike risk.

Background

In 2013 Airport staff noticed a significant increase in migratory waterfowl (ducks, geese, coots, etc.) using the Goleta Slough. This raised concerns about a potential increase in bird-strike hazard. In response to this the Airport obtained emergency permits to install a temporary siphon to lower the Slough water level. While this did lower water level, it was slow, prone to failure, and ultimately destroyed by wave action. In response to this change in condition the Airport sought federal funding to assess the potential hazard and identify hazard mitigation strategies.

The previous WHA was conducted in 2004. In the past decade the Airport has restored 40 acres of wetland habitat and relocated two creeks and the main instrument runway, creating a very different on-Airport wildlife environment. Habitat restoration and development projects off the Airport may have changed wildlife behavior.

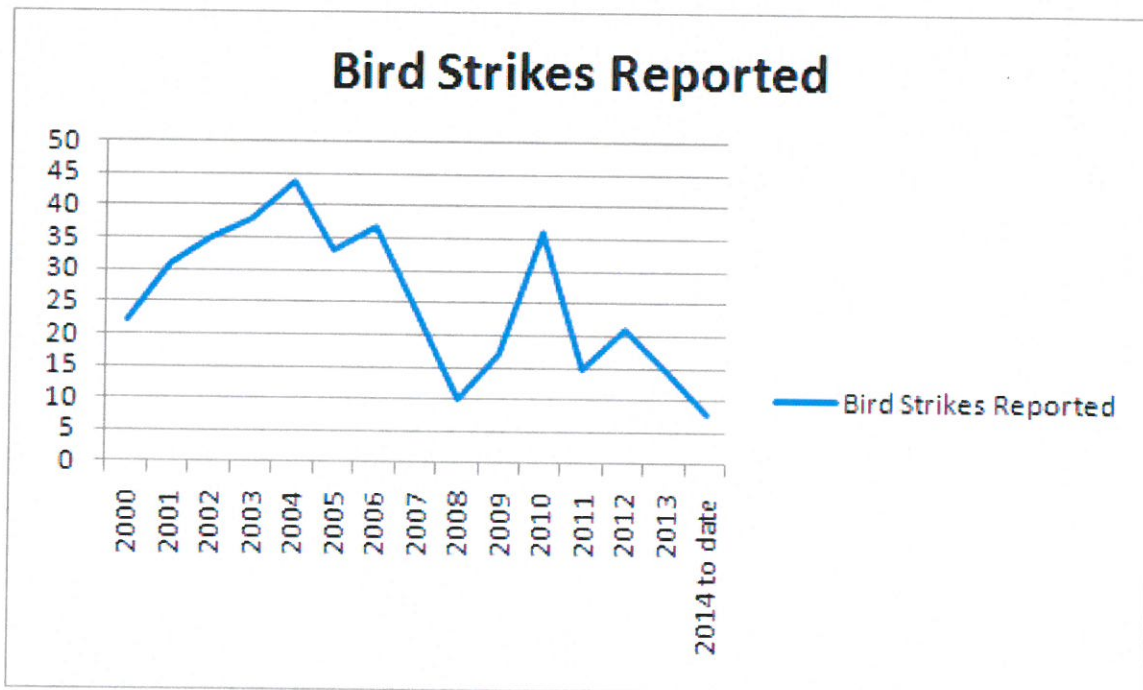
Goleta Slough

The most significant wildlife attractant is the Goleta Slough State Ecological Reserve on Airport property. This 480-acre estuarine wetland is home to over 300 wildlife species including the federally-listed endangered tidewater goby, and the state-listed loggerhead shrike and Belding's savannah sparrow. Because of its location on the coast, Goleta Slough constitutes the northernmost extent of dozens of southern California species.

Since 2012, there has been no management program for keeping the Goleta Slough mouth open to the ocean. This means that the mouth is closed seasonally by a sand berm and is only opened by a significant increase in creek flows (i.e. rainstorms). A combination of low rainfall and ocean currents has closed the Slough mouth in November 2012, March 2013, and July 2014. This results in extended periods where the Goleta Slough functions as a closed fresh-water wetland instead of an open tidal wetland. While this appears to be a significant change, it needs to be assessed in the WHA.

Bird Strikes

Airport Department records show a favorable trend in the frequency of bird strikes. The number of reported bird strikes is about half of what it was before the completion of the Airfield Safety Projects in 2007. However there have been two bird strikes that have resulted in temporary grounding of aircraft. On August 5, 2009 a US Airways CRJ-700 struck a flock of geese on departure and returned to the Airport. Also on April 19, 2012 a flock of red-necked phalaropes damaged a US Air Force Boeing 737 (Air Force 2) on approach to the Airport. While neither event resulted in any injuries or irreparable aircraft, they demonstrate the need to keep the Airport's Wildlife Hazard Management Plan up to date.



Habitat restoration in 2006 and 2010 resulted in a temporary increase (but a long-term decrease) in bird strike hazard.