



# Ventura Audubon Society

**Date:** February 14, 2022

**To:** Jay Dobrowalski  
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**Subject:** Comments on Draft EIR for the Port of Hueneme Temporary Outdoor Vehicle Storage Yard (PZ-18-500-02 Special Use Permit)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project. We are submitting our comments because the mission of the Ventura Audubon Society is to protect wild birds and their habitat. The project site abuts the Ormond Beach wetland complex, which is a conservation priority for our organization. In fact, this has been a focal point of our conservation efforts for nearly 3 decades. This is because Ormond Beach is part of the Point Mugu Globally Important Bird Area<sup>1</sup>, a designation given to it by our parent organization, the National Audubon Society (NAS). It hosts over 60,000 migrating shorebirds on their annual global migration, including many threatened and endangered bird species. Other endangered bird species are only found locally and are dependent on the area for survival. In addition to the bird life this area supports, there are 25 special status plant and animal species known or likely to occur adjacent to the project site.

The EIR acknowledged potentially significant impacts to three species: Burrowing owl, California horned lark and western meadow lark. The burrowing owl numbers continue to decline in California, with a 76% decline in the population since 2006<sup>2</sup>. The California horned lark is considered a common species; however, it is in steep decline and populations have experienced a loss of 71% according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey<sup>3</sup>. The western meadow lark had been identified by the NAS climate report<sup>4</sup> as a species that will lose most of its California range<sup>5</sup> due to climate change. Furthermore, we note that the EIR did not address the

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<sup>1</sup> (National Audubon Society; <https://www.audubon.org/important-bird-areas/point-mugu> )

<sup>2</sup> <https://burrowingowls.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/about/status>

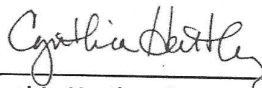
<sup>3</sup> Sauer, J. R., D. K. Niven, J. E. Hines, D. J. Ziolkowski Jr., K. L. Pardieck, J. E. Fallon, and W. A. Link (2017). The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966–2015. Version 2.07.2017. USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD, USA.

<sup>4</sup> Survival by Degrees, 389 Bird Species on the Brink;  
<https://nationalaudubon.app.box.com/s/9yj6ob340w7nezupn36ylupgcj3yk7d5/file/536966725864>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/western-meadowlark>

direct and indirect environmental impacts on areas of Ormond Beach adjacent to the project, nor did it address cumulative impacts to known special status species. The following points summarize our specific comments on the project:

1. Develop in a less sensitive area: Our preference would be selecting an alternate site not adjacent to the sensitive habitat at Ormond Beach. Once habitat has been destroyed it is never the same, even after restoration. We oppose the development of coastal properties, especially in locations adjacent to environmentally sensitive habitat.
2. Impacts to Sensitive Birds: The EIR proposes to mitigate the impacts to burrowing owls, CA horned larks and the western meadowlark by avoiding nests during construction. However, these species are present year-round. This project represents complete loss of their habitat in this location. Avoiding construction during nesting season is not acceptable mitigation for this loss. Equivalent mitigation work at another nearby site should be proposed. Alternatively, a survey meeting California Fish and Wildlife protocols for the burrowing owl should be conducted to assist in the development of avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures.
3. Nighttime Lighting: We are deeply concerned about the lighting in this project. Although downward pointing lights have been called out in the EIR, the light intensity has not been addressed. Lights must be LED streetlights with a deep amber tone under 3000K in color warmth<sup>6</sup>. This is a very sensitive area for migrants. Lights throw birds off their migration paths, and bird fatalities are caused by the amount of energy the birds waste flying around lost. Exhaustion leaves them vulnerable to other threats. The poles on which the light fixtures are mounted should also be of a type that prevents their use as a perch for predators. The EIR should do a more thorough job addressing the impacts of lighting on migrating birds and birds that forage on insects and/or at night (e.g. common poorwill, merlin, kestrel).
4. Habitat Loss: This project will destroy habitat for all species in this location. The request is to construct and operate this facility for a 5-year period. At the end of the 5-year period, the applicant should be required to restore the site to its original condition. In addition to removing structures and lighting, the gravel needs to be removed and the original habitat restored. The City should also require a bond sufficient to cover the cost of such restoration.



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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.birdsarepeople.org/letters/birds-sleep-outdoors-please-demand-wildlife-friendly-led-streetlights-below-3000k/>