

Pacific Seabird Group



DEDICATED TO THE STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF PACIFIC SEABIRDS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

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September 26, 2000

Anne Badgley
Regional Director
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Eastside Federal Complex
911 N.E. 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

Re: East Sand Island, Oregon, Should Be a National Wildlife Refuge

Dear Ms. Anne Badgley:

As you know, the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG) is an international organization that was founded in 1972 to promote knowledge, study and conservation of Pacific seabirds. PSG draws its members from the rim of the entire Pacific Basin, including the United States, Canada, Mexico, Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, and Russia. Among PSG's members are biologists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, state and federal officials who manage seabird populations and refuges, and individuals with interests in marine conservation. Over the years we have advised and worked cooperatively with government agencies to further these interests.

PSG has long been involved in the controversy surrounding the management of Caspian terns in the Pacific Northwest. Now that the Caspian Tern Working Group has been largely successful in meeting its goal to move the Columbia River Caspian tern colony from Rice Island to East Sand Island, Oregon, we believe that the Service should take steps to acquire and manage East Sand Island as a national wildlife refuge. We understand that the island is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which should make it possible for the FWS to add it to the refuge system without any direct acquisition costs. We acknowledge there would be new management costs.

We understand that East Sand Island has the following seabird resources (we acknowledge that numbers vary over time):

Caspian Terns: Roby et. al. reported 1,400 pairs nesting in 1999. In 2000, about 8,000 pairs nested there – most from nearby Rice Island – to make it the largest Caspian tern colony on earth.

Brandt's Cormorant: 40 pairs on pilings. Use of artificial structures for nesting is very rare, and this is the only estuarine breeding location for this species.

Brown Pelicans: In 2000, FWS biologists peak counts of brown pelicans roosting on East Sand Island exceeded 3,400 birds. This is by far the largest roosting site for this endangered species in the entire Pacific Northwest.

Double-crested Cormorant: On June 11, 1989, Douglas Bell recorded 91 double-crested cormorant nests in this relatively new colony. In 1999, more than 7,000 pairs nested here making this the largest breeding colony on the west coast of North America (Alaska-Mexico), by far. The next largest colony on the west coast includes three sites in Mexico each containing 1,500 pairs.

Western/Glaucous-winged Gulls: The gull colony on East Sand Island has also increased tremendously in the last decade. On June 11, 1989, Douglas Bell recorded 880 pairs of western/glaucous-winged gulls. Approximately, 7,000 nesting pairs were present 1999 representing the second largest western or glaucous-winged gull colony on the U.S. west coast, second only to Southeast Farallon Island, California. (Both species nest and there are many hybrids).

We believe that acquiring this island is well within the objectives on the National Wildlife Refuge System, and well as Region 1's seabird policy. We urge you to do so, and offer to provide our assistance to achieve this goal.

Sincerely,

Craig S. Harrison
Vice Chair for Conservation