

CATEGORY: Pre-construction Wildlife Assessment

The following review is based primarily on review of USFWS, Canada, OR EFSC, CA, WA, PA Game Commission, Draft NY DEC guidelines

Element	Level of repetition among guidance (high, med, low)	Pros	Cons
Site sensitivity assessment or rating (to determine scope of preconstruction studies)	USFWS, CA, WA, CAN, PA		
Goal of pre-construction surveys: explicit or implicit focus on risk assessment	CA, USFWS		
Consultation with USFWS and state wildlife agencies re: scope and duration of studies	USFWS, CA, All		
Diurnal bird surveys			
Duration of pre-construction surveys determined by existing information and site sensitivity	USFWS, CA, WA, OR, CAN, NY		
Recommended tools discussed?	USFWS, CA, WA, CAN, NY		
Other tools that are not generally recommended discussed?	CA		
Nocturnal bird (and/or bat) surveys			
Conduct if site or surrounding suggest high risk to nocturnal migrants			
Duration?	NY, CA, PA		
Recommended tools discussed?	CA, NY, PA		
Other tools that are not generally recommended discussed?	CA		
Habitat mapping	WA, OR, NY, Canada		
Bat surveys			

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Element	Level of repetition among guidance (high, med, low)	Pros	Cons
Focus on hibernacula	PA, NY		
Marine radar suggested	None?		
Duration varies by site sensitivity	PA, NY		
Anabat or other acoustic monitoring	CA, NY, PA		
Mist nets or other tools	NY		

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Generalizations. From the elements above, some issues emerge—

Site sensitivity assessment or rating (to determine scope of preconstruction studies): common to rate projects either numerically or qualitatively by some measure of sensitivity. Factors that are used to evaluate sensitivity include size, proximity to existing project, known risk factors (such as presence of sensitive species or their habitats), and adequacy of existing information. In the USFWS Guidelines, scope of studies linked to PII scoring process. Canada looks at project size (large = 100 or more turbines) and site sensitivity.

Goal of pre-construction surveys: explicit or implicit focus on risk assessment: Varies considerably—CA, for example, explicitly ties studies to risk assessment; NY DEC does not and describes the objective of pre-construction studies as characterizing extent of use and how features of the site may influence use.

Duration of studies: Often discussed, but typically variable according to site sensitivity. In USFWS Guidelines, “average of three years...should be collected” where there are “high seasonal concentrations of birds”—duration not specified for other cases. In CA, normally one year of bird use counts; more for more sensitive sites and less for low risk sites. Canada prescribes one or two years, more if need identified through EA process. WA asks for “one full season” (usually spring/early summer) with additional seasonal surveys if little other information exists, bird use expected to be high compared to other sites or if project is “especially large.” NY distinguishes between standard pre-construction studies (one year) and “expanded preconstruction surveys.” PA requires one year or less in most cases.

Diurnal bird surveys: Several of the guidelines (e.g., CA, WA, PA) focus primarily on diurnal rather than nocturnal avian activity. Most guidelines provide a range of tools depending on the site and issues, but point count surveys are often the common denominator. Other tools include raptor nest surveys; breeding bird and/or grassland bird surveys; and migrating raptor and eagle surveys (PA). Draft NY guidelines put more emphasis on nocturnal passerine migration.

Nocturnal Bird and Bat Studies: Typically not required as standard for birds (CA, PA, WA), but in some cases suggested for “expanded” studies or where there are indications of sensitivity (NY). Most common tool is marine radar, but other tools suggested to supplement marine radar (e.g., infrared, acoustic monitoring). CA discusses tools (e.g., acoustic monitoring for birds and ceilometers) that have been used elsewhere but that are not recommended.

Habitat Mapping: Some states (e.g., WA and OR) put significant or primary focus on habitat mapping. In others (e.g., CA and USFWS) habitat mapping may be implied but is not listed as a required method.

Bats: East coast states with Indiana Bats (PA and NY) emphasize surveys in and around hibernacula (e.g, banding and radio-tagging). Marine radar not typically recommended for bat surveys. Newer guidelines (e.g., CA, PA, NY) emphasize use of anabats elevated to 30 meters or higher (e.g., by attaching to meteorological towers). Period of acoustic surveys emphasizes spring-summer-early fall period. Other tools mentioned but typically not recommended (e.g., mist netting in CA).

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