Migratory Bird Treaty Act Conservation Opportunities
Revisions to Federal Aviation Administration Obstruction Marking and Lighting Advisory Circular

Background
Almost 7 million birds, predominantly night-migrating songbirds, die annually as a result of collisions with lit communication towers in the United States. Songbirds, seabirds, and other migratory birds can be attracted to or disoriented by tower obstruction warning lighting systems that include non-flashing lights, especially during inclement weather. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issues guidelines for appropriate pilot warning lighting designs for structures deemed aviation hazards (i.e., typically any structure >199ft above ground level [AGL]). In December 2015, the FAA released a revised Obstruction Marking and Lighting Advisory Circular AC 70/7460-1L and additional materials related to the new circular.

The revised advisory circular prescribes:
- Effective immediately, all new towers >350 feet AGL may only use flashing obstruction lighting
- Effective 15 September 2016, all towers between 151 and 350 feet AGL will employ only flashing L-810 side lights, after which all new towers >150 feet AGL may only use flashing obstruction lights
- Aircraft Detection Lighting Systems (ADLS) may be used on all towers – ADLS are sensor-based lighting systems that automatically activate the obstruction lights upon the radar detection of aircraft approaching the obstruction. This technology reduces the impact of nighttime lighting on nearby communities and migratory birds and extends the life expectancy of obstruction lights.

Why were these changes made?
Research has demonstrated that eliminating non-flashing lights on towers may reduce migratory bird collisions by as much as 70 percent. The lighting and marking standards were revised to reduce impacts on migratory bird populations and minimize light impacts on adjacent communities. However, these changes also reduce construction and operational energy costs for tower owners.

With the implementation of the new circular, the FAA, Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and the US Fish and Wildlife Service encourage owners of existing registered structures to eliminate the use of non-flashing L-810 side lights as soon as possible. For many communications towers, making this change does not require climbing the tower, and can be accomplished simply by extinguishing the non-flashing lights. Prior to changing the lighting on any registered structure, the tower owner must request a new No Hazard Determination under the new circular from the FAA, and then must file Form 854 with the FCC to amend its antenna structure registration to reflect the new lighting.

What role does the USFWS play in this?
- Outreach to the owners of existing towers is critical (especially towers >350ft AGL). Spread the word to owners regarding new standards to reduce non-flashing lighting, bird collisions, maintenance, and energy costs. Contact the FCC for a database of tower locations, descriptions, and owner contacts.
- Post information about communication tower hazards on webpages - for example: http://www.fws.gov/birds/bird-enthusiasts/threats-to-birds/collisions/communication-towers.php

Where to get more information and assistance?
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