



# United States Department of the Interior



## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Division of Bird Conservation, Permits, and Regulations  
Migratory Bird Program  
US Fish & Wildlife Service Headquarters  
5275 Leesburg Pike  
Falls Church, VA 22041-3803

Dear Applicant for communication tower project:

Thank you for choosing to use the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *Information for Planning and Consultation* tool. This letter provides information for reducing your take of birds, including those protected by the Endangered Species Act (87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 U.S.C. 703-712).

Almost [seven million birds collide with communication towers in the United States](#) every year when they are attracted into non-flashing, L-810, side-marker tower lights and security lights. Most of the birds that collide with towers are night migrating songbirds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Given that our bird populations have decreased by [three billion birds since 1970](#), we need to reduce bird losses whenever possible. To help minimize potential impacts to migratory birds, we advise consulting our detailed Recommended [Best Practices for Communication Tower](#) Design, Siting, Construction, Operation, Maintenance, and Decommissioning.

In summary, you can reduce the risk of migratory bird take at your tower project by:

- building **self-supported and unlit towers** instead of guyed and lit towers
- installing **lighting only if necessary** and then using **flashing tower lights and motion-sensor, down-shielded building security lights**
- **extinguishing or reprogramming non-flashing tower lights** on existing infrastructure, as recommended by the Federal Aviation Administration ([FAA](#)) and Federal Communications Commission ([FCC](#))
- building towers **only as tall as necessary** given that taller towers cause more bird fatalities
- **avoiding siting towers in areas with high bird density** such as shorelines, wetlands, and ridgetops

Owners of towers already constructed can save money while [eliminating 70% of bird collisions by extinguishing or reprogramming non-flashing tower lights](#). Since December 2015, the FAA's updated [Advisory Circulars](#) recommend lighting towers with only flashing lights at night, which don't attract birds. Towers owners are encouraged to reduce lighting, operating costs, and migratory bird take by updating to the most recent FAA Advisory Circular.

This short video provides a quick overview of this cost-saving option:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLHNROmSS2U>

The [FCC provides the three-step process](#) of changing tower lights:

1. Request a Determination from FAA (typically takes 2-3 weeks for approval)  
[File a Marking and Lighting study with the FAA](#) requesting to extinguish non-flashing, side-marker lights.
  - a. Complete [Form 7460-1](#), Notice of Proposed Construction or Alteration
  - b. Under Structure Type enter: “Deviation from Red Obstruction Light Standards.”
  - c. When complete, send the form to your [FAA contact](#)
  - d. Contact Joelle Gehring ([Joelle\\_Gehring@fws.gov](mailto:Joelle_Gehring@fws.gov), 989-400-0718) if you encounter issues with this process or if the FAA doesn’t respond within three weeks.
  
2. Update the FCC  
Once the FAA approves your request and assigns a new FAA Study Number, update your tower FCC registration using the [Antenna Registration System \(ASR\)](#). Please select “MD – Modification.” The FCC typically approves applications and modifies registrations within 24 hours.
  
3. Extinguish or reprogramming non-flashing tower lights  
For towers taller than 350 ft. AGL, this final and typically easy step results in immediate cost savings and doesn’t require tower climbing. Towers 150-350-ft AGL require non-flashing lights to be reprogrammed to flash. LED lighting systems are easily reprogrammed, low maintenance, and use less energy than incandescent lights. Typically, light manufacturers don’t recommend reprogramming incandescent lighting systems.

For additional information on reducing migratory bird take at communication towers please contact Joelle Gehring ([Joelle\\_Gehring@fws.gov](mailto:Joelle_Gehring@fws.gov), 989-400-0718). We appreciate the opportunity to provide information relative to fish and wildlife issues, and thank you for your interest in these resources.