

1 OSHA R. MESERVE (SBN 204240)  
2 PATRICK M. SOLURI (SBN 210036)  
3 SOLURI MESERVE, A LAW CORPORATION  
4 510 8th Street  
5 Sacramento, California 95814  
6 Telephone: (916) 455-7300  
7 Facsimile: (916) 244-7300  
8 Email: osha@semlawyers.com  
9 patrick@semlawyers.com

10 Specially Appearing for Save Our Sandhill Cranes for  
11 Purposes of Presenting Part 2 Testimony

12 **BEFORE THE**

13 **CALIFORNIA STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD**

14 HEARING IN THE MATTER OF  
15 CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER  
16 RESOURCES AND UNITED STATES  
17 BUREAU OF RECLAMATION  
18 REQUEST FOR A CHANGE IN POINT OF  
19 DIVERSION FOR CALIFORNIA WATER FIX

20 **TESTIMONY OF ED PANDOLFINO, Ph. D. -**  
21 **REVISED**

22 **SAVE OUR SANDHILL CRANES**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

I earned a Ph.D. in Biochemistry from Washington State University. After twenty years working in various management positions in the medical device industry, I retired in 1999 and have since devoted my time to ornithology. I served as president of Western Field Ornithologists, vice-president of San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, conservation chair for Sierra Foothills Audubon Society, and Regional Editor for Northern California for North American Birds, and I am currently on the board of The Institute for Bird Populations. I have published more than three dozen articles on status, distribution, behavior of western birds, with a particular focus on California's Central Valley. I co-authored with Ted Beedy, Birds of the Sierra Nevada: Their Natural History, Status, and Distribution published by U.C. Press in May 2013. I have conducted field research and done consulting for the U.S. Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Point Blue, Sacramento Valley Conservancy, and Williams Wildland Consulting. Additional information regarding my qualifications relating to ornithology is included in SOSC-23.

In order to prepare this testimony regarding my avian-related concerns about the Delta Tunnels project (a.k.a. "California WaterFix"), I reviewed the analysis in the Final Environmental Impact Report/Statement ("FEIR/S"), my own experience and existing literature with respect to the Greater Sandhill Crane, the California Black Rail, and the White-Tailed Kite. All three of these species are fully protected species under California law, and no take is permissible. (Fish & G. Code, § 3511, FSL-28.) In my opinion, the project would be contrary to the public interest due to the high likelihood of take for each of the species discussed below.

**II. TESTIMONY****A. Greater Sandhill Crane**

In 2013, the Bay Delta Conservation Plan ("BDCP") concluded that collisions with transmission lines associated with the Project posed a significant hazard to Sandhill Cranes. (SWRCB-5, 2013 BDCP, Appendix 5J; FSL-29, FSL-30.) The project that is the subject of the current petition would rely largely on marking lines with bird diverter devices to reduce this risk. (SWRCB-102, FEIR/S, p. 12-3551.) The FEIR/S estimates the rate of mortality to cranes from

1 collisions with unmarked lines and the potential for reducing those collisions by marking based  
2 mainly on studies conducted in the San Luis Valley, Colorado. (SWRCB-111, MMRP, p.4-33;  
3 see SOSC-35, Brown and Drewien 1995.) Alternative 4A proposed some changes to the  
4 project that could reduce the risk to cranes, including reducing the length of temporary and  
5 permanent power lines. (See, e.g., SWRCB-102, FEIR/S, pp. 12-3549 to 12-3551 [discussion  
6 of changes from BDCP to Alternative 4A].) However, I believe that the potential for take is  
7 underestimated in the FEIR/S.

### 8 **1. The FEIR/S Estimate of Collision Risk Is Too Low**

9 First, the analysis applied project too low of a risk for collision. Recent work by Murphy  
10 et al. (2016a), which combined searches for carcasses along lines with the use of electronic  
11 detectors of collisions and monitoring with night-vision spotting scopes showed that historical  
12 studies of crane collisions with transmission lines have likely underestimated Crane collision by  
13 at least a factor of three to four. (SOSC-44, sections 2.8 to 3.7, Murphy et al. 2016a.) Prior  
14 studies of collision risk relied mainly on searching for carcasses under transmission lines. The  
15 Murphy et al. (2016a) study, by combining carcass searches with remote sensing of collisions  
16 and observing at night with night-vision optics, showed that these studies greatly  
17 underestimated collisions. These authors found that many cranes injured in collisions were  
18 able to get beyond the area under the lines that are normally searched, and thus, these  
19 mortalities were missed. Nearly all (94%) collisions with lines occurred after dark; most of the  
20 collisions observed visually occurred after cranes were flushed. (SOSC-44, Murphy et al.  
21 2016a.)

### 22 **2. Estimated Effectiveness of Marking Lines Is Overly Optimistic**

23 Second, while marking lines could help, its effectiveness is overstated. Recent  
24 extensive reviews of the effectiveness of bird diverters (SOSC-30, Barrientos et al. 2011;  
25 SOSC-27, APLIC 2012; SOSC-60 [Table 1, Comparison of Study Results for Effectiveness of  
26 Bird Diverters on Transmission Lines]) showed a wide range of effectiveness with rates of  
27 reduced collisions ranging from less than 10% to 81% for a variety of species, with  
28 effectiveness for Sandhill Cranes ranging from 50% to 67%.

1           **3.     Conditions in the Delta Make the Risk to Greater Sandhill Cranes**  
2           **Much Greater and the Potential Benefit of Marking Lines Much**  
3           **Smaller Than Estimated Based on Brown and Drewien (1995)**

4           Fog, which is a very common factor in the Delta during the months cranes are present,  
5 poses a significant increase in risk for collisions and is likely to reduce the effectiveness of line  
6 marking. (SOSC-27, APLIC 2012; see also SWRCB-5, BDCP, Appendix 5.C, Att. 5.J.C (FSL-  
7 30).) On average, 39 of 120 days, or 32%, have significant fog in the Delta from November  
8 through February. (SOSC-58, Western Regional Climate Center 2017.) However, the study  
9 used to predict risk (SOSC-35, Brown & Drewien 1995) was conducted in the San Luis Valley,  
10 Colorado where foggy conditions are rare, occurring on average only 4 of the 90 days (4.4%)  
11 when cranes are present. (SOSC-58, Western Regional Climate Center 2017.) Thus, the  
12 occurrence of foggy conditions is more than 7 times more likely in the Delta than in the San  
13 Luis Valley of Colorado when Cranes are present. Yee studied effectiveness of bird diverters  
14 in the Delta and used an arbitrary correction factor (2.5) to assess risk of collision. (SOSC-59,  
15 Yee (2008).) This correction factor is well below that measured by Murphy. (SOSC-44,  
16 Murphy et al. 2016a.) And it is possible that the fog conditions in the Delta might even require  
17 the use of a higher correction factor than suggested by the work of Murphy et al. (2016a),  
18 which was conducted in the Platte River Valley, Nebraska.

19           Also, given that collisions are much more likely at night (SOSC-44, Murphy et al.  
20 2016a), the fact that there are more hours of daylight in the San Luis Valley when most cranes  
21 are present (February–March, and October) than in the Delta when cranes are present  
22 (November–February), may further increase the risk of collisions and reduce the likely  
23 effectiveness of line marking.

24           **4.     Modifications to Alternative 4A in the FEIR/S Would Not Adequately**  
25           **Reduce the Risk to Greater Sandhill Crane Populations**

26           As discussed earlier, some changes between the project described in the 2013 BDCP  
27 and the 2017 FEIR/S would be positive. Alternative 4A states that the new transmission lines  
28 within the main crane wintering area would not be permanent and would eventually be  
removed. (SWRCB-102, FEIR/S, pp. 12-2326 to 12-2327.) However, 31 miles of “temporary

1 lines” (which will be in place for at least 10–14 years) would still be constructed within the  
2 crane wintering area, a reduction of only seven miles compared to the proposal analyzed in the  
3 2013 BDCP. (SWRCB-5, BDCP, App. 5.J, Att. 5.J.C, p. 4.) The BDCP found that with  
4 marking of lines, 48 Greater Sandhill Crane deaths per year would still occur. (SWRCB-5,  
5 2013 BDCP, App. 5.J, Att. 5.J.C, p. 24; see also FSL-29 and FSL-30.) Thus, take would still  
6 occur as long as the transmission lines are in place.

7 **5. Drastically Increased Traffic and Other Activities in the Crane Use**  
8 **Area Would Increase the Frequency of Flushing of Cranes, Thus**  
9 **Increasing the Risk from Existing Transmission Lines**

10 The observations of Murphy et al. showed that cranes are at particular risk when  
11 flushed. (SOSC-44, Murphy et al. 2016a.) Since the project would substantially increase  
12 traffic and other activities related to construction and ongoing monitoring and maintenance  
13 (see, e.g., SWRCB-102, FEIR/s, pp. 19-207 to 19-210 [expected increase in traffic throughout  
14 project area]), transmission lines already in place prior to the project would pose an increased  
15 risk.

16 **6. Recommended Condition of Approval**

17 Before any plan to mitigate risk from collisions with transmission lines is implemented,  
18 new studies would need to be conducted in the project area to determine the actual risk, given  
19 the findings of Murphy et al. that standard carcass searches significantly underestimated the  
20 number of collisions. (SOSC-44, Murphy et al. 2016a.) These studies should use methods  
21 similar to those used by Murphy et al., including the use of electronic collision detectors and  
22 night-vision optics. (SOSC-44, Murphy et al. 2016a.) Further, the use of glow-in-the-dark (or,  
23 perhaps lighted) bird diverters should be tested based on their potential to reduce collisions at  
24 night (SOSC-45, Murphy et al. 2016b).

25 The only alternative that would eliminate the risk of take of Greater Sandhill Cranes  
26 from collisions with transmission lines would be to place all lines associated with the project  
27 within the crane wintering area, permanent and temporary, underground. To reduce the  
28 heightened risk to cranes from flushing, all existing lines should be marked with bird diverts  
likely to be most effective after dark. As discussed in Friends of Stone Lakes NWR comments

1 on the project, underground transmission lines would be feasible. (See SWRCB-102,  
2 Comments and Responses to Comments, Letter 1562, pg. 42 43 [2013] and Letter 2629, p.  
3 186 [2015].) Yet, even with these conditions in place, I believe take of the Crane would still  
4 occur, which would be contrary to the public interest.

## 5 **B. Project Effects on California Black Rail**

6 The project's environmental review and permitting documents do not correctly  
7 characterize the behavior of the California Black Rail ("Black Rail"), as described below. The  
8 FEIR/S concludes that, while collisions with transmission lines pose a potential risk to Black  
9 Rail based on the physical attributes of this species, its "sedentary, non-migratory" nature  
10 allows such risk to be discounted. (SWRCB-102, FEIR/S, p. 192-3525; see also FSL-30 and  
11 SWRCB-3, Appendix 5.J, Att. 5.J.C.)

### 12 **1. The California Black Rail Is Not Strictly Sedentary or Non-Migratory**

13 Within the Black Rail species, there is a range of typical behavior depending on a given  
14 population's location. A substantial population of California Black Rail was recently found in  
15 the Sierra foothills (SOSC-25, Aigner et al. 1995) and has been documented to breed in nearly  
16 200 sites in Butte, Yuba, Nevada, and Placer counties. (SOSC-49, Richmond et al. 2008.)  
17 This population is estimated to be comparable in size to the entire San Francisco Bay/Delta  
18 population. (SOSC-40, Girard et al. 2010.)

19 This foothill population is far from sedentary, demonstrated by the fact that black rails  
20 will discover and colonize new patches of habitat within a few to several miles of existing  
21 populations, often within the first year following establishment of the new habitat. (SOSC-50,  
22 Richmond et al. 2010; S. R. Beissinger, pers. comm.) Thus, Black Rails are dispersing widely  
23 from existing breeding locations in search of new ones.

24 Most importantly, genetic analysis shows that there is migration between the Bay  
25 Area/Delta population and the foothill population (SOSC-40, Girard et al. 2010), as  
26 demonstrated by gene flow between these widely separated populations.

27 Other Black Rail locations separated from the Bay/Delta have been documented on the  
28 Central Valley floor including: White Slough (SOSC-52, San Joaquin Audubon 2002) north of

1 Lodi (where Black Rails have been found consistently for many years), and two sites south of  
2 Sacramento (Cosumnes River Preserve and Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge). (SOSC-  
3 51, Rottenborn et al. 2016.)

4 The observation of Trulio and Evens (2000) that some Black Rails nesting in the north  
5 San Francisco Bay winter in the south Bay, further demonstrates the non-sedentary nature of  
6 at least a portion of this population. (SOSC-55, Trulio and Evens 2000.)

7 **2. Transmission Lines Associated With the Project Pose a Collision**  
8 **Risk to the California Black Rail**

9 The combination of night migration and the physical attributes (high wing loading, low  
10 aspect ratio) of Black Rails, makes them highly susceptible to collisions with power lines.  
11 (SOSC-34, Bevanger 1998.) The movements of Bay Area/Delta Black Rails to and from the  
12 Sierra foothills (as noted above) as well as likely movements between the Bay/Delta and  
13 Central Valley floor sites means that birds may move through the project area and face the  
14 threat of collisions with the many miles of new transmission lines associated with the project.

15 **3. Recommended Condition to Avoid Take of Black Rail**

16 The only alternative that would eliminate the risk of take of Black Rails from collisions  
17 with transmission lines is to place all new lines associated with the project, permanent and  
18 temporary, underground. At a minimum, all new AND existing lines could be fitted with bird  
19 diverters visible at night (glow-in-the-dark or lighted) when Black Rails migrate. These bird  
20 diverters may not be sufficient to eliminate the risk of take.

21 **C. White-tailed Kite**

22 The FEIR/S Alternative 4a relies almost entirely on mitigation and environmental  
23 commitments intended to benefit Swainson's Hawk to mitigate threats to the White-tailed Kite.  
24 (See SWRCB-102, FEIR/S, pp. 12-3615 to 12-3624 [avoidance and minimization measures  
25 purported to apply to White-tail Kite].) This analysis is problematic given key differences  
26 between the two species.



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1. **There are Fundamental Differences Between Swainson's Hawk and White-tailed Kite Habitats**

While there is significant overlap between preferred foraging habitats of Swainson's Hawk and White-tailed Kite (both species commonly forage in alfalfa, irrigated pasture, grassland, and hay fields), there are also significant differences.

These two species require very different grassland conditions for foraging. Swainson's Hawk use well-grazed grassland with low vegetative cover (SOSC-32, Bechard 1982; SOSC-39, Estep 1989; SOSC-33, Bechard et al. 2010), while White-tailed Kites prefer ungrazed, relatively over-grown grassland. (~~SOSC-29~~, Bammann 1975; ~~SOSC-37~~, Dunk 1995; SOSC-47, Pandolfino et al. 2011.) Pandolfino et al. (2011) (SOSC-47) found White-tailed Kites present in ungrazed grassland in densities five times greater than in grazed grassland. Therefore, grasslands managed for Swainson's Hawk would not be nearly as valuable for White-tailed Kite.

White-tailed Kites were found most strongly-associated with wetland of all habitat types in the Central Valley in winter. (SOSC-47, Pandolfino et al. 2011.) Swainson's Hawks make relatively little use of wetlands. (SOSC-39, Estep 1989; SOSC-33, Bechard et al. 2010.)

Much of the mitigation for Swainson's Hawk would be in cultivated crops such as sugar beets and tomatoes. While these crops are used by White-tailed Kites in spring and summer (SOSC-39, Estep 1989; ~~SOSC-38~~, Erichsen et al. 1996), these fields are typically plowed dirt in winter (when Swainson's Hawks are absent but White-tailed Kites remain), and are a habitat avoided by White-tailed Kites in winter. (SOSC-47, Pandolfino et al. 2011.)

CDFW's incidental take permit for Swainson's Hawk requires significant protection/restoration of alfalfa as a high-quality foraging substrate. (SWRCB-107, CDFW Incidental Take Permit, p. 111.) Alfalfa is also frequently used by White-tailed Kites. (SOSC-39, Estep 1989; SOSC-33, Bechard et al. 2010; SOSC-47, Pandolfino et al. 2011.) However, there is no clear mechanism or budget that would insure that lands preserved as agriculture would continue to plant alfalfa, regardless of the potential to switch to other, higher income, crops.



1 It is also uncertain when preserved/restored habitats will be available. If there is a  
2 significant lag between impacts on key habitats and restoration, take of White-tailed Kites may  
3 occur. This is a particular risk for this species given its relatively sedentary nature and  
4 reluctance to move to new areas. (SOSC-54, Stendell & Myers 1973; ~~SOSC-37, Dunk 1995.~~)

5 White-tailed Kites are frequently the target of aggressive attacks from larger raptors.  
6 Such attacks include physical contact (SOSC-48, Pinkston & Caraviotis 1980; SOSC-41,  
7 Heredia and Clark 1984; SOSC-28, Baladron & Pretelli 2013), stealing of prey (SOSC-41,  
8 Heredia & Clark 1984; SOSC-28, Baladron & Pretelli 2013), and even predation. (SOSC-48,  
9 Pinkston & Caraviotis 1980.) Thus, even in areas with high habitat quality for both the kite and  
10 Swainson's Hawk, the larger Swainson's Hawk may persecute the smaller (less than ½ in  
11 weight) Kite and compete for prey. (SOSC-53, Sibley 2014.)

12 **2. Recommended Condition of Approval**

13 To reduce the risk of take of the White-tailed Kite, I recommend the following:

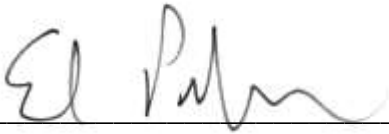
- 14 (a) Adequate areas of high quality foraging habitat would need to be  
15 retained/created within 1 km of potential nesting sites;
- 16 (b) Additional grassland would need to be conserved and managed for White-tailed  
17 Kite (ungrazed or very lightly grazed);
- 18 (c) A clear, enforceable, well-funded requirement for agricultural habitats to be  
19 maintained in high quality (alfalfa, in particular) must be included; and
- 20 (d) Restoration and preservation of foraging and nesting habitats must occur before  
21 impacts occur.

22 **III. CONCLUSION**

23 The project as described would result in unreasonable impacts to avian wildlife.  
24 Take of Greater Sandhill Crane is certain, take of California Black Rail is likely, and take of  
25 ///  
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1 White-tailed Kite is possible. Take of any of these Fully-protected Species would be contrary  
2 to the public interest.

3  
4 Executed on the 30th day of November, 2017, at Sacramento, California.

5 

6  
7 Ed Pandolfino

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