


Joseph
Brandt/VFWO/R1/FWS/DOI
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To "Bob Stafford" <bstafford@dfg.ca.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Chimineas Feeding Sites 

Bob,

Thanks for the shapefile.

After a bit of research into how the service has handled NEPA for other Condor related operations I believe the establishment of new feeding sites may fall under CAT EX (1508.4). I believe this would be the case because on two occasions the service established release sites (Big Sur & Northern AZ) using the categorical exclusion criteria. These release sites, determined to have no significant effect on natural or socioeconomic resources, both included the long term use of feeding sites. Therefore I think new feeding stations would also fall under the same category as long as we are confident that the proposed sites are not going to have an impact on any T & E species. Am I correct in thinking that the sites we checked were outside of normal Kit Fox habitat use? I am not as familiar with CEQA but after a quick check I think that because these stations will be contributing to the recovery of condors it looks like they could fall under Article 19 Categorical exemption, specifically: 15307 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources.) What do you think?

In terms of your other questions:

1. *Will it impact current operations (maintenance, hunts, tours, bio surveys, etc)? You have a rough idea of the schedule.*

This may vary depending on each site but I would like to make any impacts as minimal as possible. I was under the impression that the Saltos and 28 tank sites get very little traffic so I don't think that there would be any impact at all. I believe we could easily schedule around any possible conflicts (as we have done on Wind Wolves) I got the impression that the proposed Johnson Flat feeding site might get more traffic (foot traffic by the public or otherwise) in this case we could look into when this is most likely to occur (during hunting seasons etc.) and avoid feeding at this site during those times. I foresee a schedule much like our other remote feeding sites: weekly feedings rotating between established sites. If we used three sites on the ranch this would amount to feeding twice a month at one site and once a month at the others. The twice a month site would change each month.

2. *Is there a buffer zone around the stations where human activity will be limited?*

Yes. Spatially a buffer might be a bit dependent on topography and vegetation but in general a buffer of three to five hundred meters of limited activity would be appropriate. We might use a natural or temporary blind a bit closer for monitoring purposes. We also might want to consider a buffer temporally. By this I mean setting a set time period for how long activity should be limited once a site is baited. We might start out conservatively with five days to a week but then decrease that after getting a better idea of how long the carcasses last.

3. *How are you going to deal with winter? The 2 best sites (Saltos Peak, 28 tank) can get pretty sloppy.*

I will be dealing with this on wind wolves. In the end winter weather will likely reduce the number of carcasses that we will place. We could also allow feeding schedule to be a bit more flexible (as weather allows) during those months or by feeding more often at Johnson Flat during

periods of bad weather. The only other possibility would be to have some alternate form of transportation like ATVs. All of our staff are ATV trained and use them regularly on our refuges. This is how we deal with carcass placement during inclement weather out at Bitter Creek but I think we don't have the enough ATVs to spare keeping one at Chimineas (or if that is something we could even consider.)

4. Do you anticipate that there will be any issues since we do not restrict the use of lead for upland game hunting?

My immediate response is no but I am going to follow up on this with some program partners. My thinking as it relates to upland game and lead is that there is currently no evidence indicating that this presents any threat to condors. Given the small likelihood that condors will locate animals of this size in a not recovered in a hunting situation I don't think there is much cause for concern. Even if there were some risk this risk would not be exclusive to Chimineas and the benefits of new feeding stations would still be the same.

5. It sounded like you wanted to put out a carcass every couple of weeks and rotate locations. Is this still correct?

I guess I was thinking more like baiting one of the sites once a week and rotating through them but this is something we can be flexible about. The number of carcasses we bait with can vary depending on carcass size and type or how much scavenger/condor activity we have at any given site.

I am going to start working on structuring these ideas into a more formal proposal that we can bounce back and forth if that is okay with you. We also have the ability to do a bit of applied research related to condor range expansion techniques as well so I'll try to keep that in mind as well. I appreciate any and all of your input and help in getting this project going.

Last but not least: we just had our field working group meeting out in AZ last week and I think people maybe interested in having the next meeting at Chimineas if that would be possible. What would that entail? The meetings are about every 6 months so the next one would be some time in April or May 2009.

Cheers
Joseph