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June 21, 2007

Mr. Curtis Cash  
Environmental Monitoring Division  
City of LA -- Hyperion Wastewater Treatment Plant  
12000 Vista del Mar  
Playa del Rey CA 90293

SUBJECT: 2007 Spring Survey Report for Belding's Savannah Sparrow Surveys, Ballona 1135 Restoration Project, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District

Dear Curtis:

As you know, the Ballona 1135 Restoration Project (BRP) was implemented by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District (Corps) in spring 2003. The BRP included improvement of tidegates between the Ballona Creek Channel and the Ballona Wetlands to improve tidal flushing. The Corps requested that Keane Biological Consulting (KBC) conduct focused surveys in 2004 for the Belding's Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis beldingi*<sup>1</sup>) at the Ballona Wetlands Study Area (Study Area—Figure 1) as part of BRP. The Belding's savannah sparrow (hereafter BSS), listed as endangered under the California Endangered Species Act since 1974, is known to nest in the Study Area, in clumps of pickleweed (*Salicornia* sp.). Improved tidal flushing in the Study Area may temporarily inundate BSS habitat, although the BRP is expected long-term to beneficially affect the extent and health of pickleweed, a common plant of coastal saltmarshes in California. Thus, the Corps is interested in concomitant effects of the BRP on the BSS population in the Study Area. The City of Los Angeles took over management of this project in the winter of 2004 and contracted with KBC to conduct another year of BSS surveys in 2005 and 2007. This letter report summarizes the results of spring (April and May) 2007 surveys for BSS in the BRP survey area. A separate report will be prepared documenting results of summer (June) 2007 surveys, followed by a Draft Report and Final Report summarizing all 2007 surveys.

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<sup>1</sup> Scientific names are provided only after the first mention of the common name in this document.

## **Introduction**

The Study Area is located in Marina del Rey, California, and is bordered on the north by the Ballona Creek channel, on the south by the Southern California Gas facility and adjacent bluff, on the west by the community of Playa del Rey and on the east by the Southern California Gas Company access road south of Culver Boulevard and on the north by Culver Boulevard as it curves northeast (Figure 1).



(aerial photography by Eagle Aerial)

**Figure 1. Location of Study Area for Belding's Savannah Sparrow Surveys, 2007.**

KBC conducted surveys for BSS in the Study Area in 2001 (KBC 2001), prior to the BRP, in addition to general bird surveys. The 2001 BSS surveys documented 13 to 15 BSS in the Study Area. Surveys of the Study Area were conducted by the Corps in 2003; however, these included only general bird surveys and no focused surveys for BSS. No focused BSS surveys were conducted in 2006; however, Kathy Keane and Brad Henderson of the California Department of Fish and Game conducted a one-morning survey on May 13, 2006 as part of a statewide BSS census and estimated 12 BSS territories (Zemba 2006). KBC surveys in the BRP Study Area documented approximately 12 BSS territories in 2004 (KBC 2004) and 11 BSS territories in 2005 (KBC 2005), similar to 2001 results and 2006.

## **Methods**

The entire Study Area was surveyed by Kathy Keane of KBC, with emphasis placed on the area around the main and west channels, on three dates in the spring: April 8, May 6 and May 11, beginning between 6:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. and concluding by 11:00 a.m.

Field notes were maintained during each survey and included notes on BSS behavior and other bird species observed. In addition, the survey route was drawn on an aerial photograph of the Study Area during each survey and ensured that all areas of tidal and non-tidal saltmarsh habitat dominated by pickleweed were surveyed.

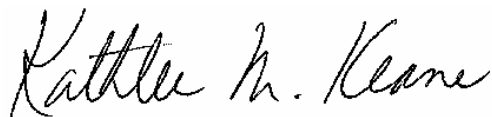
Survey methods followed those used by KBC during 2001, 2004 and 2005 surveys, which are patterned after those of Zembal *et al.* (1988 and 2006). Methods entail walking slowly and stopping adjacent to all areas of suitable habitat and watching and listening for singing males and other breeding behavior (feeding young, carrying nesting material) to determine the number of breeding pairs or territories. Locations of sightings were recorded on the aerial photograph of the Study Area. When a bird carrying nesting material or food for young was noted, the observation continued until the approximate location of a nest was observed. Sightings of singing males, non-singing individuals or pairs, individuals carrying nesting material, and other pertinent observations were recorded on an aerial photograph of the Study Area. A list of birds observed during the survey was maintained and will be provided in the Draft Report.

## **Results**

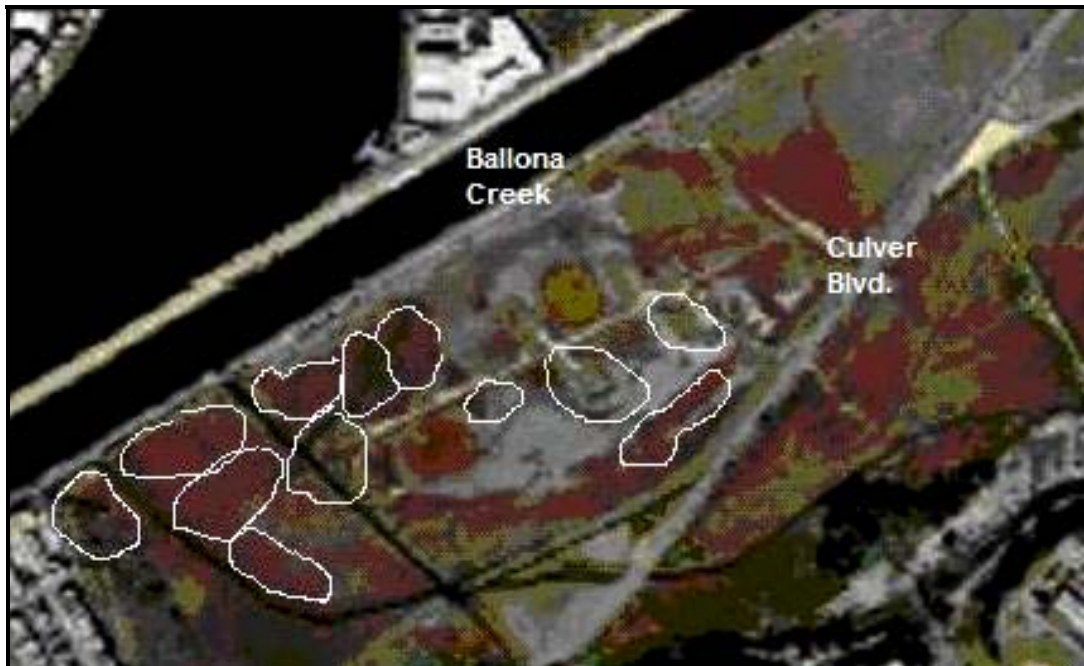
BSS were later than usual to establish territories and nest in 2007. During the April 8 survey, BSS singing was sporadic and no territorial chases were observed. Thus, subsequent surveys were delayed until May. Approximately 12 BSS territories were present during spring 2007 surveys (Figure 2). The Draft Report will include detailed results, and a discussion comparing the results of 2007 surveys with previous surveys. The Summer Survey Letter Report will also be submitted to you in July.

Thank you for requesting the services of Keane Biological Consulting.

Sincerely,  
KEANE BIOLOGICAL CONSULTING

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathleen M. Keane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathleen M. Keane



**Figure 2. Approximate Belding's Savannah Sparrow (BSSP) Territory Locations, 2007.**

### **References Cited**

- Keane Biological Consulting (KBC). 2001. Surveys for sensitive avian species at Playa Vista, 2001, unpublished report prepared for Impact Sciences, Inc.
- KBC. 2004. Focused Surveys for Belding's Savannah Sparrow at the Ballona Wetlands, 2004 as part of the Ballona Wetlands Biological Study for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Post-Restoration Study. Prepared for MEC Analytical Systems, Inc. – Weston Solutions, Inc. as part of Contract No. DACW90-1-D-0007. August 24, 2004.
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- Zemba, R.L., K.J. Kramer, R.J. Bransfield, and N. Gilbert. 1988. A survey of Belding's savannah sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis beldingi*) in California. *American Birds*: 42(5), pp. 1233-1236.
- Zemba, R., J. Konecny, and S. M. Hoffman. 2006. A survey of the Belding's Savannah sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis beldingi*) in California, 2006. Calif. Dep. Fish and Game, Habitat Conservation Planning Branch, Species Conservation and Recovery Program Report 2006-03, Sacramento, CA 15 pp.