

Status of the American White Pelican in Washington



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Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN

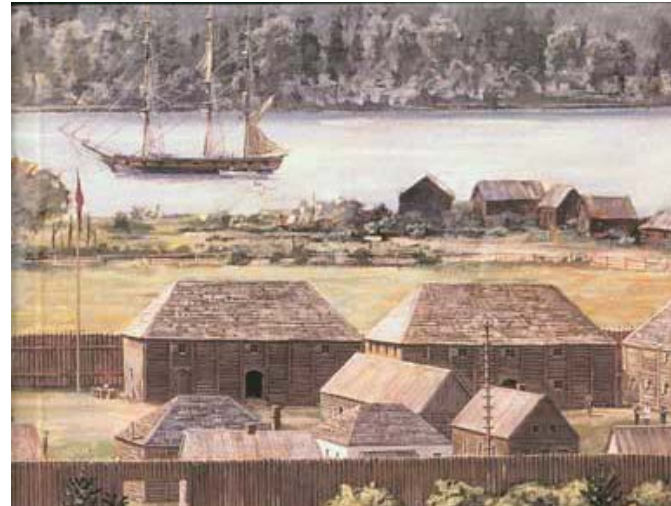
- Nest on islands in freshwater; rear 1 chick
- Down-listed to state Threatened in 2017
- **Not listed under ESA** (protected under MBTA)
- **Range-wide:** < 50 colonies, >1/2 birds at 4 large colonies
- **West:** <15 active colonies



Population status:

Declined **range-wide** in the 19th-20th centuries due to:

- Water projects, persecution, feather trade
- DDT



Historically in Washington:

- Noted by Lewis & Clark in Columbia in 1805;
- 1830s [J.K. Townsend “in spring they retire inland to breed”]
- 1847: small lake at Potholes “swarmed with pelicans” (Anglin 1995)



Population status:



Photo in WDFW files circa, 1940s, unknown location

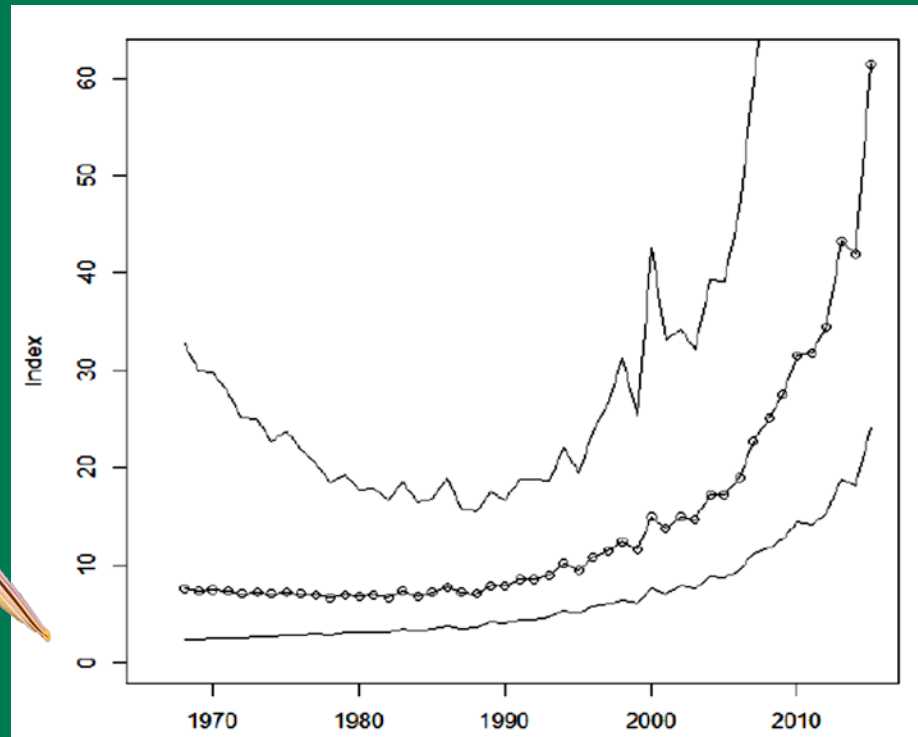
Historically in Washington:

- **Nested Moses Lake in 1920s** (Brown 1926); up to ~500 pelicans seasonally on Moses Lake, 1902 until 1940s (Motschenbacher 1984)
- **May have nested at:** Sprague Lake, Coffee Pot Lake, Kahlotus Lake, at Pasco/mouth of Snake River area (Motschenbacher 1984)
- **Extirpated from 1940s - 1993**



Population status: range-wide

- Populations have recovered from pre-1970 declines:
- 2018: ~50,000 birds at western colonies
 - **Breeding Bird Survey data** suggested +13%/yr from 2005-2015

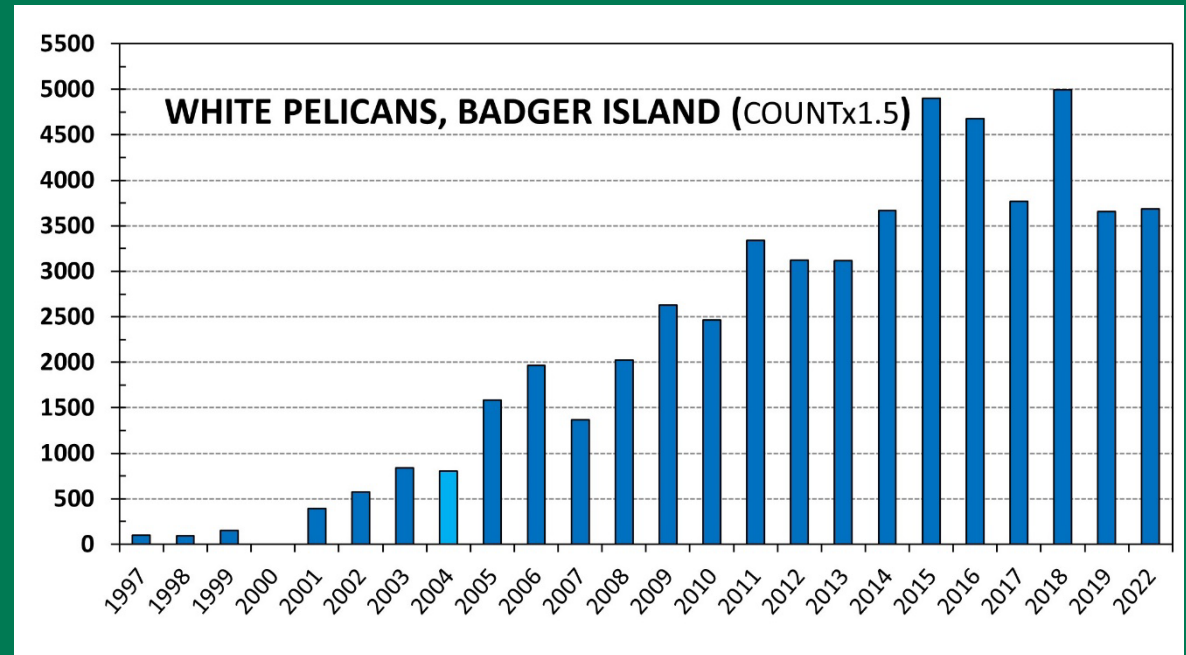
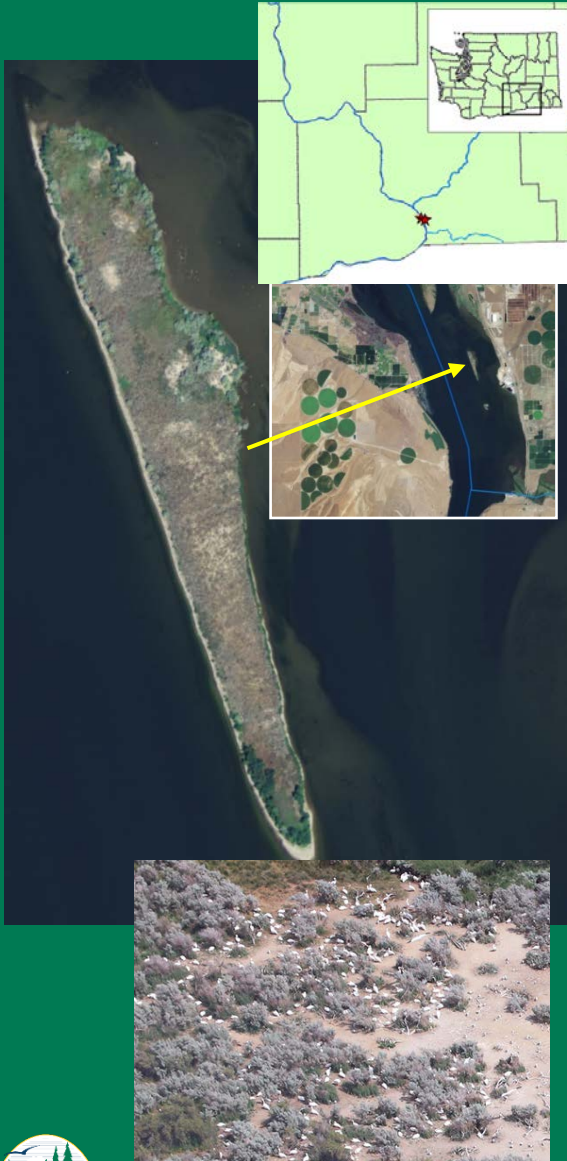


Breeding Bird Survey WEST

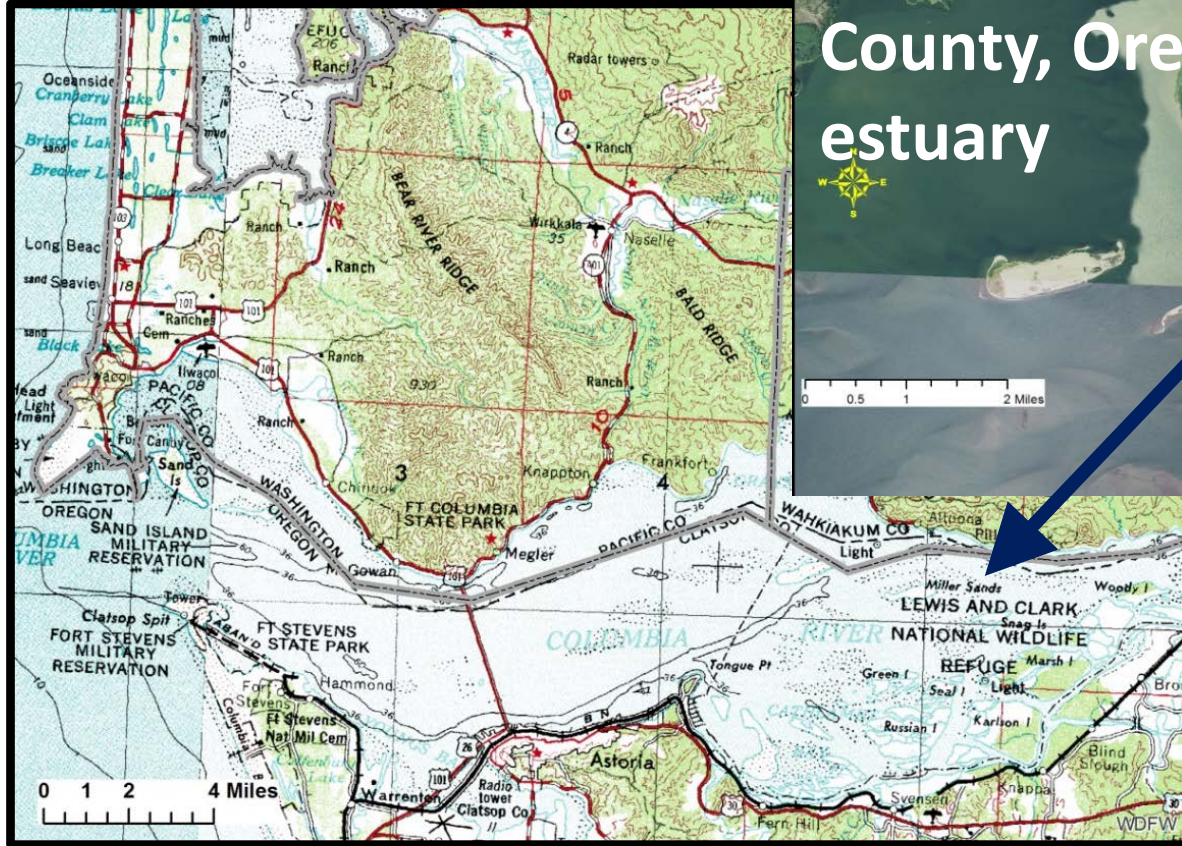


Population status: Washington

- Resumed nesting in WA 1994
- **Badger Island, McNary NWR**
 - 5,595 breeders in 2018
- >1,000 nonbreeders present (?)



2010: pelicans began nesting on Miller Sands Spit, Clatsop County, Oregon, in Columbia estuary



- **2014-2020: 100-350 nests**
(often disturbed, colony abandoned/shifted to Rice Is.)



Potential new nesting colony?

Padilla Bay:

- **2017: 18 chicks**
- **2018: disturbed, abandoned**
- **2019-2020: no nesting**
- **2021 (photo): 40-50 nests, but abandoned by 5 July**





Fisheries conflicts: eat mostly nongame or "rough" fish (carp, suckers, chub, minnows, pikeminnows?, Tiger Salamanders, and crayfish, etc., (data from Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, N. Dakota, BC, Alb, Sask.) but opportunists...

- Bird depredation on ESA-listed salmonid stocks a concern

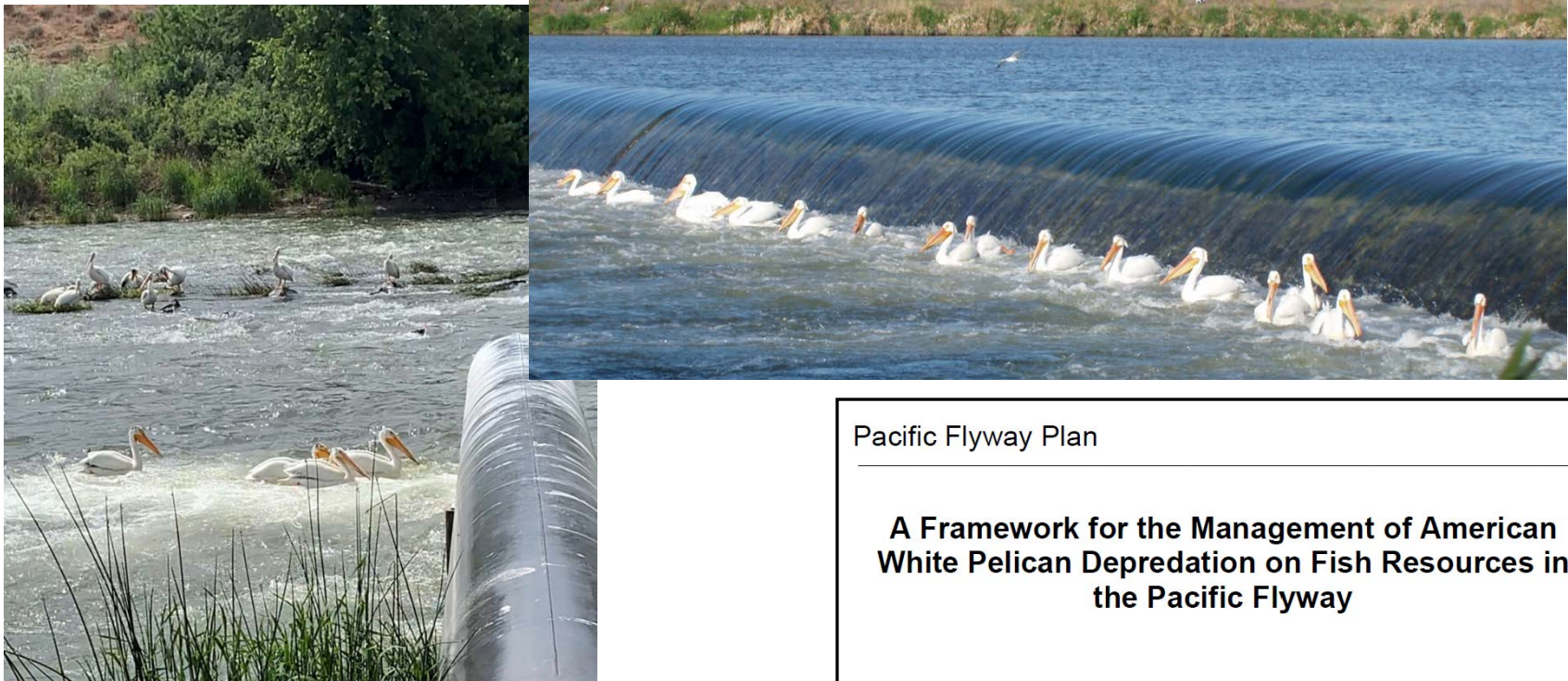
Badger Island colony:

- impact on smolts of most ESA-listed salmon runs much less than by terns, cormorants, gulls, but...



But...

- **Impacts to URB Fall Chinook significant**, Hanford Reach to Bonneville (Payton et al. 2020: avian predation 8.6-42.8%; pelicans #1)
- **Yakima River:** hatcheries, pelican numbers up; may be significant (data needed?)



Pacific Flyway Plan

A Framework for the Management of American White Pelican Depredation on Fish Resources in the Pacific Flyway

Pacific Flyway Council-guidance



Factors Affecting White Pelicans:

- **Human disturbance:** colonies sensitive,
- **Disease** - *West Nile Virus*. –killed >9,000 white pelicans
-*botulism* –In 1996 killed 8,500 at Salton Sea
- **Competing demands for water** may be the greatest long-term issue affecting white pelicans



Lake Kahlotus Largemouth Bass Fishing



[Largemouth Bass Info]

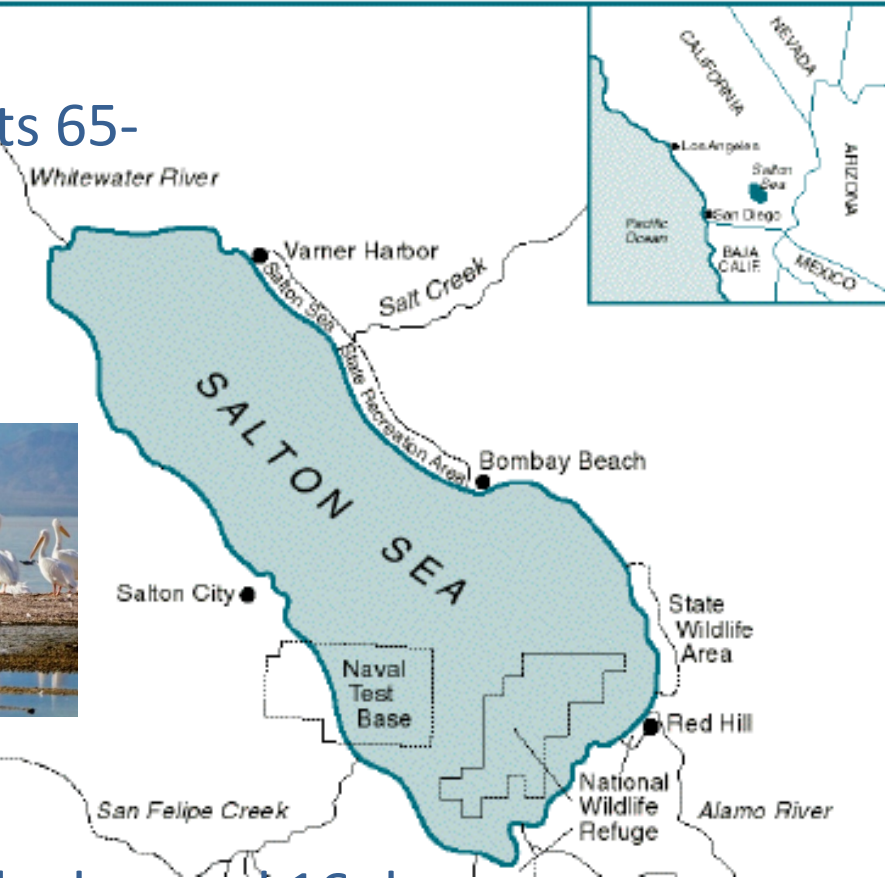
Lake Kahlotus Largemouth Bass Rating:  0/5



Factors Affecting White Pelicans:

Pesticides and contaminants:

- The Salton Sea in s. California, hosts 65-85% of western population during migration (agric. run-off, pollution, sewage, rising salinity, selenium)



Climate change:

- Chase Lake, ND: spring arrival advanced 16 days...
- Cold/wet killed thousands of chicks 2005-2008
- **Drought** (e.g. Gunnison Island, Great Salt Lake)



AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN



Conclusions

White Pelicans have increased in Washington

- Badger Island colony has increased to >2,000 pairs
- New smaller colony (Miller Sands Spit, OR) in lower Columbia (and possibly Padilla Bay)
- Fisheries conflicts (significant for some runs/years)

but...

- Washington still consistently hosts only one colony
- Sensitive to disturbance and monitoring should continue

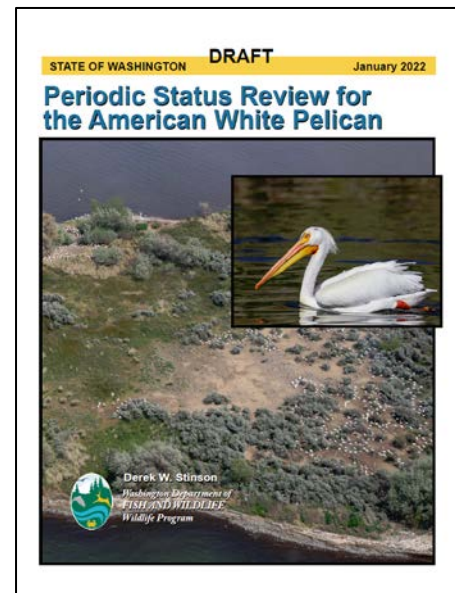


Currently: threatened = “likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout a significant portion of its range ... without cooperative management or removal of threats.”

Recommendation:

Down-list the White Pelican to Sensitive

Sensitive = “vulnerable or declining and is likely to become endangered or threatened in a significant portion of its range within the state without cooperative management or removal of threats.”



Recommendation:

Down-list the White Pelican to Sensitive

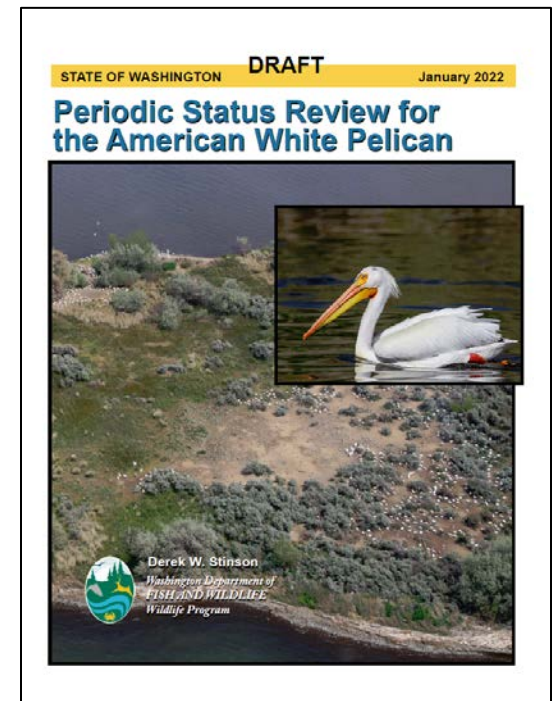
Public Comments:

8 approved of decision to down-list (including the Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission)

0 opposed

3 expressed fisheries concerns

1 disapproved of hazing/dissuasion at dams



Questions?



Acknowledgements

Photos by many known and unknown, but including Joe Higbee; Michael Porter, Yakama Nation Fisheries; Casey Clark, WDFW

Data from: Don Lyons, Tim Lawes, Oregon State Univ., Pacific Flyway Nongame Committee, Breeding Bird Survey

