

General Public Comment - Bird nesting surveys have been completed in the Petaluma Wetlands

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Parks&Rec

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Dear Commissioners,

This past week, surveys for active bird nests at the Ellis Creek wastewater recycling facility, Shollenberger Park and Alman Marsh were completed by biologist Lisa Hug.

Ellis Creek falls under auspices of Public Works, but I believe Shollenberger Park and Alman Marsh are within your auspices.

This is very important information for you, as these surveys are the bases to ensure compliance with federal and state regulations protecting active nests and nesting birds. Nesting season is Feb. 15 to Aug. 31.

This is also important because this information should be used to guide decisions about vegetation management.

The biologist, Lisa Hug, documented her findings and marked buffer zones in nesting areas with orange flags and/or red/orange ribbons. Buffer zones are areas to protect active nests, into which there should be no encroachment and certainly no use of any power equipment that would disturb the nesting birds and nests.

This information has now been provided with mapped locations of nesting areas to the Parks and Rec Department and Public Works Department.

Surveys like these should have been carried out annually by the City of Petaluma and have not been done. I began receiving calls last year by deeply concerned residents who were aware of active nests being mowed over and mowed down by City of Petaluma staff and/or contractors.

I arranged a meeting with a Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Warden earlier this year to help inform members of the Parks and Rec and Public Works Departments about federal and state laws protecting nesting birds.

Collaborating with Petaluma Wetlands Alliance, Madrone Audubon led the way to secure the services of a qualified biologist and to move forward with nesting surveys. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with Petaluma Wetlands Alliance, stewards of the Petaluma Wetlands.

I would be happy to give a presentation to your Commission about this important activity - environmental protection and adherence to environmental laws. Although there is no public information at Alman Marsh, Shollenberger Park and Ellis Creek about the Petaluma Wetlands being a designated Ramsar Wetland of International Importance, Madrone Audubon led this effort, including funding the mapping and preparing the application for the City of Petaluma in 2014. Audubon continues to have a significant interest in and appreciation for the Petaluma Wetlands.

I asked the Argus Courier to feature an article about the appearance of flags and ribbons at Ellis, Shollenberger and Alman, to help the public become aware of why certain areas will look a little wild and will not be mowed until the end of nesting season, so I hope the A-C will come through for us, to help park and area visitors understand and also support protection of nesting birds.

The federal and state laws have been in existence for a very long time - and compliance is required. We are in the midst of a climate crisis at this time and we all can cultivate sensitivity to and protection of species who truly need our support.

Sincerely,
Susan Kirks, President
Madrone Audubon, Sonoma County