

Potential impacts of proposed Foothill-South (241) toll road extension to birds, wildlife, and habitat

As debate continues regarding the proposed extension to the Foothill-South (241) toll road in Orange County, the project's potential environmental impacts to Southern Orange County region are a major point of discussion. This fact sheet aims to provide information regarding potential impacts to birds, wildlife, and habitats in and around the project area. This information is the result of ongoing monitoring and study of the area by Audubon, Audubon California, and local Audubon chapters in Orange County.

Important Habitat

- Proposed project bisects the Southern Orange County Important Bird Area (IBA), one of 150 sites in California designated by Audubon according to a scientific analysis of avian values as part of a global ornithological effort led by Birdlife International.
- Of these 150 IBAs, the Southern Orange County site ranks among the most important due to the abundance of sensitive bird species found there, as well as the unique nature of the habitat in this area.
- Of particular importance is the coastal sage scrub habitat, which is increasingly rare and under threat from development.
- The proposed project would also run through a large portion of the 1,200-acre Donna O'Neill Conservancy, created in 1990 to mitigate development in the region.
- This privately-held parcel is home to 200 species of plants and animals, and more than 6,000 Coast Live Oaks.

Threats to threatened or endangered bird populations

- Region is home to roughly 50 percent of the remaining global population of San Diego Cactus Wren, and up to 25 percent of the remaining U.S. population of Coastal California Gnatcatcher (a federal endangered species).
- A complete list of the sensitive bird species occurring within the Southern Orange County Important Bird Area includes:

Allen's Hummingbird	Southwestern Willow Flycatcher*	Sage Sparrow
Least Bittern	Loggerhead Shrike	Grasshopper Sparrow
Northern Harrier	Least Bell's Vireo*	Tricolored Blackbird
Golden Eagle	Cactus Wren	White-tailed Kite
Western Snowy Plover*	Coastal California Gnatcatcher*	
California Spotted Owl	Swainson's Thrush	* Threatened or endangered species
Burrowing Owl	Yellow Warbler	
Long-eared Owl	Yellow-breasted Chat	

Sensitive wildlife species

- The project also increases threats to a number of other highly sensitive species and protected species, including the Pacific Pocket Mouse, Arroyo Toad, Tidewater Goby, Southern Steelhead, Coast Horned Lizard, Mountain Lion, Red Diamond Rattlesnake, and Spadefoot Toad.

Destruction of state park land

- The project as currently described will build over 60 percent of San Onofre State Beach, an important unit of the California State Parks system, and this destruction will likely lead to the abandoned of the popular facility.
- San Onofre State Beach contains much of the habitat described above, and its status provides an important level of protection for birds and wildlife that rely on the continued available of this habitat to survive.
- Thousands use this unique park for surfing, camping, hiking, birdwatching, swimming, and other outdoor activities.