

BDCP: Expanding Sandhill Crane Habitat

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The Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) includes conservation actions for 57 plant and wildlife species, including the greater sandhill crane, believed to be one of the world's oldest bird species. Thousands of sandhill cranes winter in the Delta, roosting in shallow wetlands and foraging on nearby farmlands. Because the cranes forage almost entirely on privately-owned agricultural lands, expanded efforts to protect these lands are essential to ensure that suitable habitat remains available in the Delta.

The BDCP seeks to restore and protect approximately 145,000 acres of habitat during its 50-year term. These restoration efforts include biological goals and objectives to address the needs of migratory birds, including the greater sandhill crane.

The BDCP Biological Goals and Objectives for greater sandhill crane have been updated based on proposed project refinements to include higher habitat targets than those appearing in previous drafts of the Biological Goals and Objectives.

Additionally, avoidance and minimization measures are included in the BDCP to reduce indirect effects, including:

- Maintaining flooded corn fields and optimizing management of lands in the vicinity of indirectly affected crane roosting/foraging habitat, prior to and during construction, to encourage cranes to remain in the vicinity.
- Restricting the timing and location of construction-related activities in the vicinity of roost sites during the winter, when cranes are present.
- Placing barriers between construction activities and crane roost sites to reduce both noise and visual effects.
- Locating power lines and other facilities to minimize effects on cranes.

New Tunnel Route: Preserving Crane Habitat

Proposed refinements to the water conveyance facilities and tunnel alignment have been introduced based on a comprehensive review and analysis to balance costs, engineering design, and ease of construction while minimizing local dislocation and disturbance. The combined actions of realigning the conveyance tunnels and moving the intermediate forebay create additional restoration opportunities.

The refined water conveyance alignment includes an overall reduction of approximately 330 acres in the loss of permanent and temporary sandhill crane roosting/foraging habitat compared with the previous proposed alignment. BDCP implementation will result in a net permanent gain of 504 acres of roosting/foraging habitat, with at least 180 acres of new habitat in the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge Project Boundary. While BDCP will result in a 4 percent permanent loss in crane foraging habitat, the value of crane foraging habitat on protected lands is expected to increase substantially. The net increase in roosting habitat, and the increase in area and value of protected foraging habitat are expected to protect and expand crane populations within their winter range in the Plan area.

In coordination with local Delta landowners and stakeholders, additional refinements will continue to be considered to avoid and minimize impacts to crane habitat.

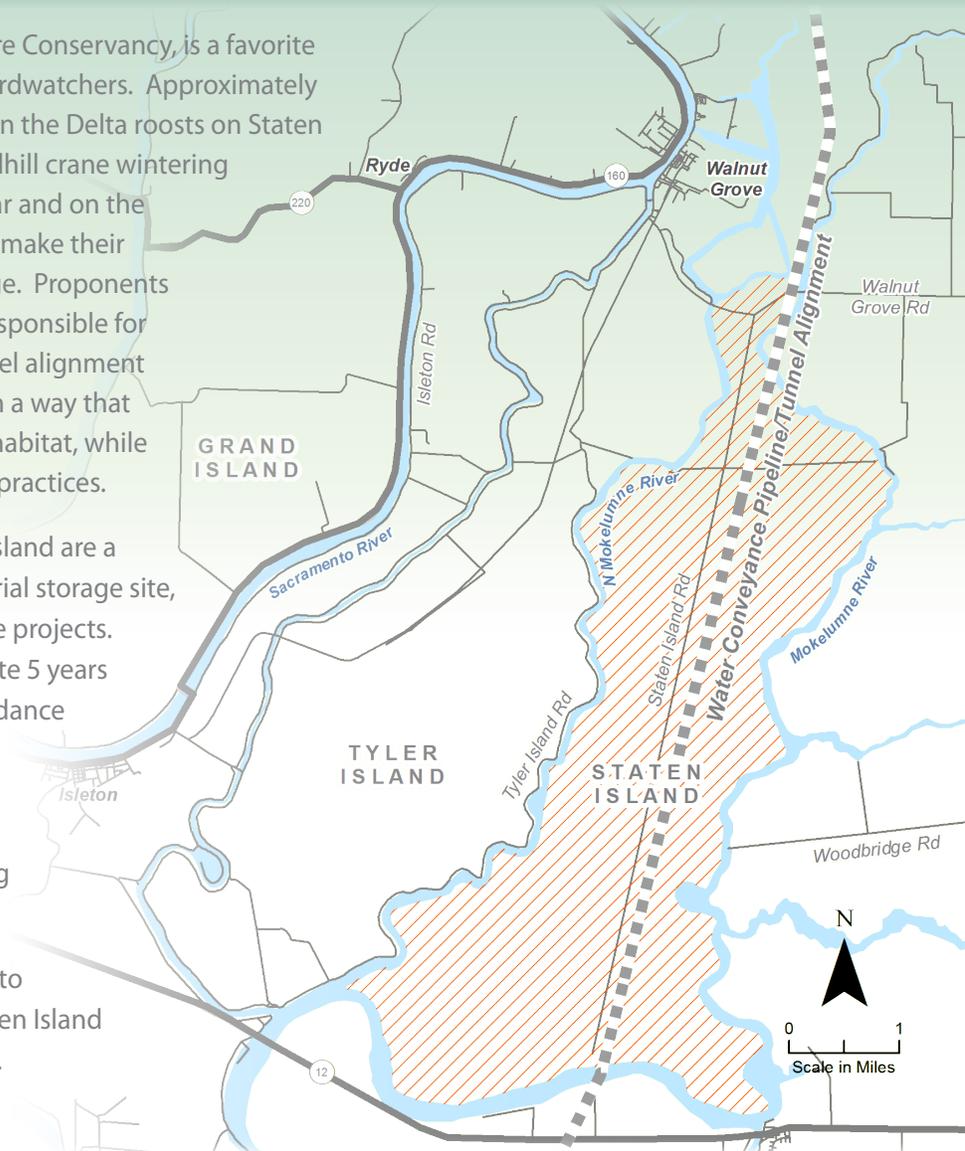


Staten Island: Protecting a Special Place

Staten Island, owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy, is a favorite stop for sandhill cranes and a popular spot for birdwatchers. Approximately 20 percent of the crane population that winters in the Delta roosts on Staten Island, making it one of the most important sandhill crane wintering sites in the North Delta. The public roadways near and on the island are popular spots for watching the cranes make their daily return to nests from fields where they forage. Proponents of the BDCP intend to work closely with those responsible for the welfare of Staten Island to create a final tunnel alignment plan and manage construction and operations in a way that minimizes disruptions to roosting and foraging habitat, while protecting and enhancing bird-friendly farming practices.

Among the potential project impacts to Staten Island are a construction shaft and a 1,274-acre tunnel material storage site, which could be reduced through proposed reuse projects. While construction impacts are expected to create 5 years of temporary disruption to existing habitat, avoidance and minimization efforts and expanded habitat included in the BDCP's habitat restoration conservation measures are expected to result in a long-term net benefit to sandhill crane roosting habitat.

Additionally, BDCP is working with stakeholders to identify potential roadway modifications on Staten Island to enhance public access to crane-viewing areas.



No final decisions can be made on BDCP prior to the completion of environmental review and public input. Final alignment will be based on further stakeholder input to maximize agriculture productivity and minimize impact to migratory bird habitat, including sandhill crane habitat.