



June 7, 2007

File: 78650-35 Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team

Michael Hooper, President and CEO  
Nanaimo Airport  
PO Box 149 Spitfire Road  
Cassidy BC V0R 1H0

Dear Mike Hooper:

Re: Response to "Airport Under Fire" column in the Bulletin, May 24, 2007

In a Garry Oak Recovery Team Vertebrates-at-Risk Recovery Implementation Group meeting held on May 25, 2007, you had asked our team to comment on the article "Airport under Fire" that appeared in the Nanaimo Bulletin. On May 25, 2007 one of the professional biologist members with extensive experience in Coastal Vesper Sparrows visited both the proposed site of the runway extension and the site of the nesting Coastal Vesper Sparrows.

The Nanaimo Airport property is home to rare bird species. Specifically, there is a population of Coastal Vesper Sparrows at this site. The Common Nighthawk, a recently COSEWIC-listed species, also nests on the airport grounds. Both of these species are ground nesting and require sparse vegetation with some bare soil. Both nest within the restricted access area at the southern end of the airport.

Other more common ground-nesting species also breed on the airport grounds. Presumably they can nest successfully on the airport property because they have adapted to airplane noise and are otherwise relatively undisturbed by humans or other domestic animals (e.g., dogs and cats) that are often detrimental to nestling survivorship.

The Nanaimo Airport management team has been working closely with the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team Vertebrates at Risk Recovery Implementation Group (Verts RIG) on issues pertaining to rare birds. For example, since 2002, this group has monitored the Coastal Vesper Sparrow population at the airport, making recommendations regarding timing of mowing and other vegetation management issues. Airport managers have been very cooperative and support the maintenance of this population, in balance with human safety issues.

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A recent article in the Bulletin stated that the proposed runway extension would run through an area "that is home to several species of rare birds including endangered Vesper Sparrows". The site has been surveyed by a registered professional biologist who is a bird specialist with 10 years of habitat assessment experience. The biologist is very familiar with the habitat requirements of the Coastal Vesper Sparrow, having been involved with the project since 2002.

There are no known records of Vesper Sparrows in the hayfields off of the end of the existing runway, or on the property on the opposite side of Haslam Road where the proposed lighting would be placed. The habitat on this property is wet meadow (primarily Reed Canary Grass, Himalayan Blackberry and other shrubs) near the road, with some cottonwood (now topped) and other shrubs typical of riparian habitats in this region. Vesper Sparrows do not favour wet meadows or riparian vegetation as they require much sparser vegetation. Some common species (Red-winged Blackbirds, Song Sparrows, Yellow Warblers and Common Yellowthroat and others) probably breed in this area. However, neither the hay fields on the airport side of Haslam Road nor the wet meadows on the opposite side support breeding populations of any rare bird species. Runway expansion to the north of the existing runway would not impact existing Vesper Sparrow habitat.

Yours truly,



Trudy Chatwin, Chair  
Vertebrates-at-Risk Recovery Implementation Group  
Rare and Endangered Species Biologist