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## Local groups seek extension to study radio tower project

By Jonathan Edwards

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Local environmentalists and landowners worry that a 365-foot radio tower set to be built at the county landfill will kill birds.

Results Radio, a Santa Rosa-based company, won unanimous approval for its tower from the Yolo County Planning Commission in May. Owners of Conaway Ranch, the 17,300-acre swatch of farmland east of the landfill, appealed the decision. They want at least a 30-day extension to study the project.

Now county supervisors will hear from both sides at the board's Tuesday meeting, which starts at 9 a.m. at the County Administration Building, 625 Court St., Woodland.

Proponents say the project will increase the reach of grassroots radio, including the UC Davis student-run KDVS, provide small businesses with affordable advertising and improve emergency communications.

"The new tower would increase our listenership from 200,000 to 500,000" by covering the Sacramento region, said Neil Ruud, KDVS general manager in a letter to Board Chairwoman Helen Thomson. In doing so, it would expose more listeners to Yolo County's "rich" culture.

But the tower's lights and support wires will kill unwitting birds, according to the appeal from Conaway. The thickest wires are 1/2-inch in diameter.

The tower and wires "create a potentially significant impact on migratory birds, especially 350 species of night migrating birds," according to a 2000 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report cited in a legal document outlining the project's impacts on the environment.

Communications towers kill 4 million to 5 million birds each year, according to an estimate from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. That number is bound to get bigger since companies are throwing radio, cell, microwave and TV towers up at a rate that's increasing 6 to 8 percent each year.

Conaway's not alone. The local Sierra Club also wants the extension. "Our major concern is the real potential for significant bird kills as a result of the tower at this location," says Pam Nieberg, president of the Sierra Club Yolano Group Motherlode Chapter, in a letter to Yolo supervisors.



None of those studies were conducted out west, however. The majority of bird strikes were in other parts of the country at towers 1,000 to 2,000 feet tall, according to the county's report. "The lack of rigorous study of bird strikes in the western United States makes it difficult to quantify mortality from bird strikes, the county's report says.

"Science simply cannot forecast how often bird strikes may occur," said environmental consultant James Estep in a report.

The Davis City Council pushed Ron Castro, chief technical officer for Results Radio, to build a tower without using wires, noting that the landfill is located close to bird hotspots and is smack dab in the middle of the Pacific Flyway, a major migratory route for birds.

Birds use many wetlands and bodies of water near the landfill, including the landfill's drainage ponds (530 feet away), the Willow Slough Bypass (0.4 miles to the south), the Davis wetlands (2 miles southeast) and the Yolo Bypass (3 miles southeast).

A number of native species live in these areas, including the Swainson's hawk, tri-colored blackbird, the giant garter snake and various waterfowl, according to a letter sent to the county by Regina Cherovsky, operations manager for Conaway.

Even though the tower would sit in the Pacific Flyway, it would not block a "specific well-defined or traditional flight pathway, such as within a canyon, along a ridge line or along a watercourse," Estep says in his report.

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