

17 June 2009

Ms. Sarah Lucas
Aviation Planner
WH Pacific
9755 SW Barnes Rd., Suite 300
Portland, OR 97225

RE: Northern Idaho ground squirrel survey
Proposed taxiway relocation project, McCall, Idaho Airport.

Dear Ms. Lucas:

Please consider this letter a report of my survey for northern Idaho ground squirrels along the route of the proposed taxiway relocation project at the McCall, Idaho Airport.

It is my understanding that the proposed taxiway relocation project will move the existing taxiway to the east to increase the separation between the taxiway and the existing runway from around 200 feet to up to 400 feet. The impact area is about 300 feet east of the existing taxiway.

The project is in an area designated "probable historical distribution" in the northern Idaho ground squirrel recovery plan based upon the types of habitats the species is known to occupy and the historical distribution of those habitats (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2003) and the project area is clearly within the historical range of the northern Idaho ground squirrel. Appropriate habitat certainly exists in the area around McCall, so there could easily be undiscovered populations in the area of the survey.

On 5 June 2009, I met with you and Don Anderson, Airport Manager at the Airport Office. After a tour of the airport with Mr. Anderson, I searched the project area for any evidence of northern Idaho ground squirrels. For safety reasons, I was accompanied by you during all activities at the McCall Airport.

The best months for conducting surveys for northern Idaho ground squirrels in the McCall area are usually May and June, and surveys are especially accurate after the young of the year are active above ground in June. Ground squirrels are most active during good weather.

The survey was conducted during early June in good weather in early morning when ground squirrels would be expected to be most active. Thus the timing was ideal or nearly so. We walked slowly out along the east edge of the taxiway, searching the area between the taxiway and the boundary fence. When we reached the south end of the runway, we crossed the boundary fence and returned back to the north, searching likely areas to the east of the boundary fence. As we walked, we carefully searched any potential habitat east of the taxiway for any signs of ground squirrels out to and beyond the 300 feet impact area whenever suitable habitat was seen.

While searching, the procedure was first to scan the area for ground squirrel activity. Ground squirrels often sit on logs, stumps, rocks or other observation posts where they can be readily seen. Then we searched the area by looking carefully for ground squirrels, burrows, runways, feces, badger digs, alarm calls, or other evidence of northern Idaho ground squirrels.

Most burrows of northern Idaho ground squirrels can be distinguished from those of other mammal species in the area by such characteristics as entrance size, angle of entry into the ground, placement of the entrances, etc. However, there is some overlap among species in burrow characteristics and a few burrows will always be ambiguous. While searching on foot, I was also watching for burrows and/or individuals of Columbian ground squirrels (*Spermophilus columbianus*), voles (*Microtus* sp.), yellow-pine chipmunks (*Tamias amoenus*), and northern pocket gophers (*Thomomys talpoides*).

During the survey, I saw no northern Idaho ground squirrels, nor did I find their burrows or any other signs of the species' presence in 2.5 hours spent searching the site. Of the other species mentioned above a few gopher burrows and vole trails were the only evidence noted. In fact, I saw almost no potential habitat during the survey. The area next to the taxiway is very rocky and the area east of the taxiway is flood irrigated, and in fact very wet during our survey. This would make the area unsuitable for a species that depends on well-drained burrow systems. However, I did note that Columbian ground squirrels were present on the bluff further to the east across the pasture.

This negative finding does not mean that northern Idaho ground squirrels could not immigrate into the site at some time in the future, especially if the area were no longer flood irrigated and there was a population nearby. However, I am convinced that ground squirrels are not currently present in the project area immediately east of the taxiway, nor could they live there as long as flood irrigation continues. Consequently, relocation of the taxiway should have no negative impact on northern Idaho ground squirrels.

I hope this information is useful to you. Please let me know if I may be of further assistance. With all best wishes,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Yensen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eric Yensen