Winging It:
Determining the Feasibility of a State-wide Birding Trail for California

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Purpose of Research

Investigate the feasibility of a state-wide birding trail in California given the state’s current infrastructure, resources, and demand.
Why Birding?

- Bird diversity in CA
- National birding expenditures
- Pre-existing infrastructure
- Economic crisis

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Table 3. Diversity: Top-Ranking States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>PLANTS</th>
<th>MAMMALS</th>
<th>BIRDS</th>
<th>REPTILES</th>
<th>AMPHIBIANS</th>
<th>FISHES</th>
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<tr>
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Table 4. Risk: Top-Ranking States

<table>
<thead>
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<th>RANK</th>
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<th>REPTILES</th>
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<td>California</td>
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<td>California</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2006)
Methods

• Benchmarking of birding trail development in states with established trails
• Survey of birding trail coordinators
• Survey of rural hoteliers
• Analysis of existing birding and wildlife tourism data
• Content analysis of trail websites and publications
Preliminary Findings: Benchmarking State Trails

• 16 states with official state birding trails

• Non-consumptive birding data:
  – Florida (GFBT)
    • $447 Million in sales/yr.
    • 19,000 jobs/yr.
  – Texas (300+ sites)
    • Travelers devoted an average of 31 days/year to birding on the trail!!!
    • Travelers on the trail averaged expenditures of $78.50
    • Only 4.6% of travelers on the trail were residents within the region.
Preliminary Findings: Infrastructure

• Two existing CA birding trails:
  – Central Coast Birding Trail (83 sites, 4 counties, 300 species)
  – Eastern Sierra Birding Trail (2 counties, 40 sites)
Preliminary Findings: Infrastructure cont’d

- CA Watchable Wildlife
  - Partnership of 15 stakeholders
    - Federal, State, Local govt. agencies (CA DFG, BLM)
    - Private
    - Non-profits
  - 70 sites throughout the state
  - Interactive website – birds used as search criteria
Preliminary Findings:
State Coordinators Survey

– Semi-structured interviews of state coordinators ongoing
– Issues
  • Funding to market trail
  • Legality: A Lesson to Learn (privatization)
  • Environmental Sustainability (Agriculture)
– Proven Benefits
  • Economic
  • Socio-cultural
  • Environmental
Preliminary Findings:
Rural Hoteliers Survey

• Responses to date:
  • 79 respondents
  • 63% from northern California
  • 89% indicate that majority of their guests are from California, 10% from other states, 1% international
  • 88% agree or strongly agree with the ideal of environmental sustainability
  • 89% say that they promote environmental sustainability either moderately or a lot
  • 42% of hotels currently accommodate birders
Preliminary Findings: Rural Hoteliers Survey cont’d

Hotels offering wildlife packages

Possibility of offering discounts to birders
Preliminary Findings: Rural Hoteliers Survey cont’d

Support for a state birding trail
What We’ve Learned Thus Far

- Basic infrastructure exists for a state trail
- CA Watchable Wildlife partnership may be a key component of the initiative
- Hotels currently hosting birders; are interested in increasing this market
- Hoteliers strongly support the concept of state trail
- Moving from the current disconnected trails to a state trail may be costly
The Way Forward

- Complete coordinator and hotelier surveys
- Continue secondary data review
- Attempt cost-benefit analysis of establishing trail
- Analyze the best way to pay for a trail of this magnitude in light of world economic uncertainty
- Determine a means of involving additional stakeholders beyond hoteliers and the CA Watchable Wildlife
Questions/Comments?

Thank you for BEARing with me!