Target Range Pre App Comments 5-26-16

by Gerhard Knudsen sent by email

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comment on the subdivision being proposed at 4328 Mount Avenue. As you know, Five Valleys Audubon Society has had a long-standing interest in land development activity that may impact areas having valued avian habitat. In those instances where such impacts might occur, we have suggested mitigating actions.

The twenty acres of land comprising the planned 15-lot development is, for the most part, dedicated to agricultural use. It would appear that hay production and, perhaps, some grazing are the primary activities. A small portion of the land area contains riparian vegetation (trees and shrubs) associated with an irrigation ditch.

We would expect that the number of bird species using these habitats would not be extensive. Regular crop harvesting and/or grazing on much of the property would limit the species to such common birds as Savannah Sparrows and Red-winged Blackbirds. The created riparian habitat along the irrigation canal would doubtlessly contain more species, including some songbirds. However, given the isolated nature of the habitat and the extent of human use on nearby land, the species list would likely be short.

In view of the property's present use and that of nearby ownerships, we do not see where the proposed subdivision would be in conflict with our resource protection objectives. Even now, the avian habitat has limited value given the agricultural activity that encompasses most of the property. Similarly, with the proposed subdivision in place, riparian habitat adjoining the canal would likely see little change in bird use.

Assuring that now-present species continue to use the riparian area would require some form of habitat protection. The preferable option would be that of designating the land a Riparian Resource Area and held in common ownership. Perpetual preservation of the riparian resource might be accomplished through use of a covenant, development agreement or riparian management plan. If the riparian area is included within lots, the same sort of resource protections should be considered. Whether designated a common area or a lot, the riparian area should be protected from adjoining human activity by a vegetated buffer.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to comment at this early stage of subdivision plan review. If you should wish any further information or clarification regarding our comments, please feel free to contact Jim Brown or me.