



Shaping the future for birds

April 30, 2010

On behalf of American Bird Conservancy, I write to urge you to deny the permit authorizing the White Stallion coal plant to be built in Matagorda County. If granted, the coal plant's operation will have an impact on one of the nation's most significant areas of native coastal habitats for birds; where early winter species avian diversity is among the highest in the United States, an area that supports a large breeding populations of waterbirds, and where a massive numbers of migrating birds pass through during the spring and fall.

American Bird Conservancy (ABC) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of wild native birds in the Americas. Founded in 1994, ABC has long been a leader in Partners in Flight and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative and is the only U.S.-based group dedicated solely to overcoming the greatest threats facing native birds in the Western Hemisphere. ABC has 8,000 members, offices in Virginia and the District of Columbia, and staff in California, Indiana, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New York, Oregon, and Texas.

As you may know, since 1997, Mad Island Marsh has ranked first in the nation in number of species during the annual Christmas Bird Count, and has been designated a globally Important Bird Area by American Bird Conservancy. Wintering birds include more than 8,000 herons, including more than 30 Reddish Egrets, some 56,000 waterfowl, more than 10,000 shorebirds, and good numbers of Sandhill Cranes, Sprague's Pipits, and Le Conte's and Seaside Sparrows. Among the birds found seasonally are Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Mottled Ducks, Yellow and Black Rails, American Avocets, and Dickcissels.

White Stallion will increase emissions of nitrogen oxide, mercury, and lead all of which have negative impacts on birds and humans. For example, unlike some other metals, lead plays no biologically functional role in living systems. Instead, it substitutes in dysfunctional ways for calcium in biochemical interactions involving the latter as an essential chemical component. Calcium is involved in biochemical reactions related to neural transmission, enzymatic reactions, cell membrane function, action potentials, muscle contraction and motility, cell secretion, blood coagulation, cell membrane potential, exocytosis, and the calcium sensor system. The substitution of lead in these biochemical processes has multiple effects on neurological, renal, reproductive, pancreatic, and muscular functions, among others. Fetuses and children under the age of 7 years are particularly sensitive to even low levels of exposure to lead and often suffer neurological damage, and clinicians now assert that there is no safe level of lead in the body tissues of these most vulnerable subjects.

White Stallion would also pull 36,000 acre-feet of water from the Colorado River every year, reducing needed availability to shorebirds. In addition, increased activity from the two barges required to deliver coal every day would contaminate the water with toxic runoff and erode the embankments and likely impact nesting success. Lastly, the proposed plant would be located along a 100-year floodplain and would store coal ash waste on site. In the event of extreme weather, that toxic waste could easily wash into public waterways, degrading another resource crucial for birds and other wildlife.

Finally, birds are not only beautiful and interesting creatures eagerly welcomed by millions of Americans into their backyard every year; they are also an important natural resource shared among countries and their people. What may not be well known is that birdwatching is also the fastest growing outdoor activity in America, with more than 30% of adults actively participating – far exceeding our designated national pastime, baseball. In addition, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, birdwatching contributes nearly \$85 billion to our economy every year, or about 1% of GDP - \$32 billion in retail sales, and \$13 billion in state and federal income taxes.

The proposed development will have far-reaching negative effects on one of our region's most valuable environmental assets. Therefore, American Bird Conservancy respectfully requests you oppose the proposed White Stallion coal plant.

Sincerely,

Darin Schroeder
Vice President of Conservation Advocacy
American Bird Conservancy