Caspian Tern Management in the Columbia River Estuary

Photo courtesy OSU/RTR

Aug 2004

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Pacific Region

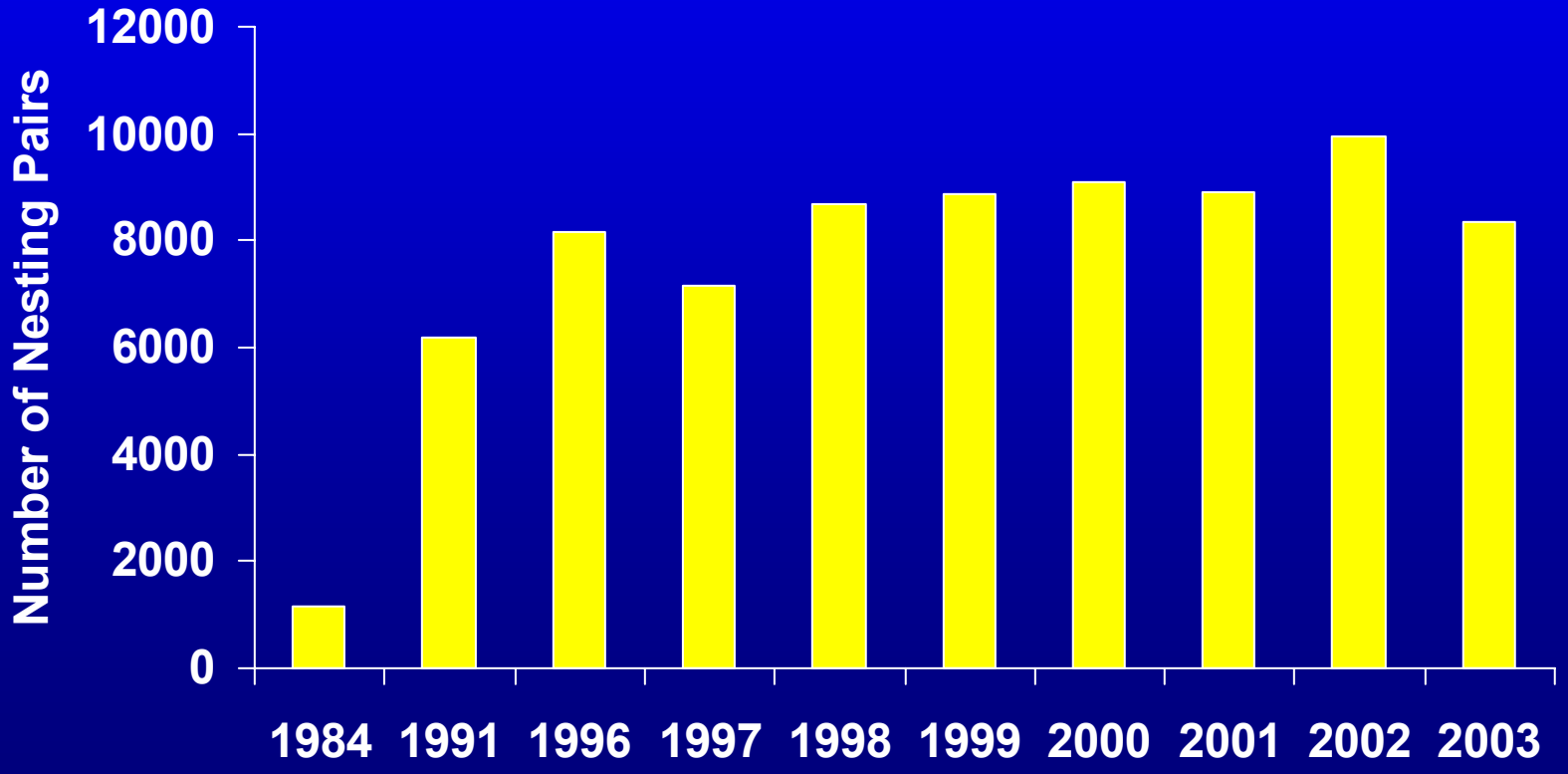
National Marine Fisheries Service
Northwest Region

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Portland Division

Issue Summary

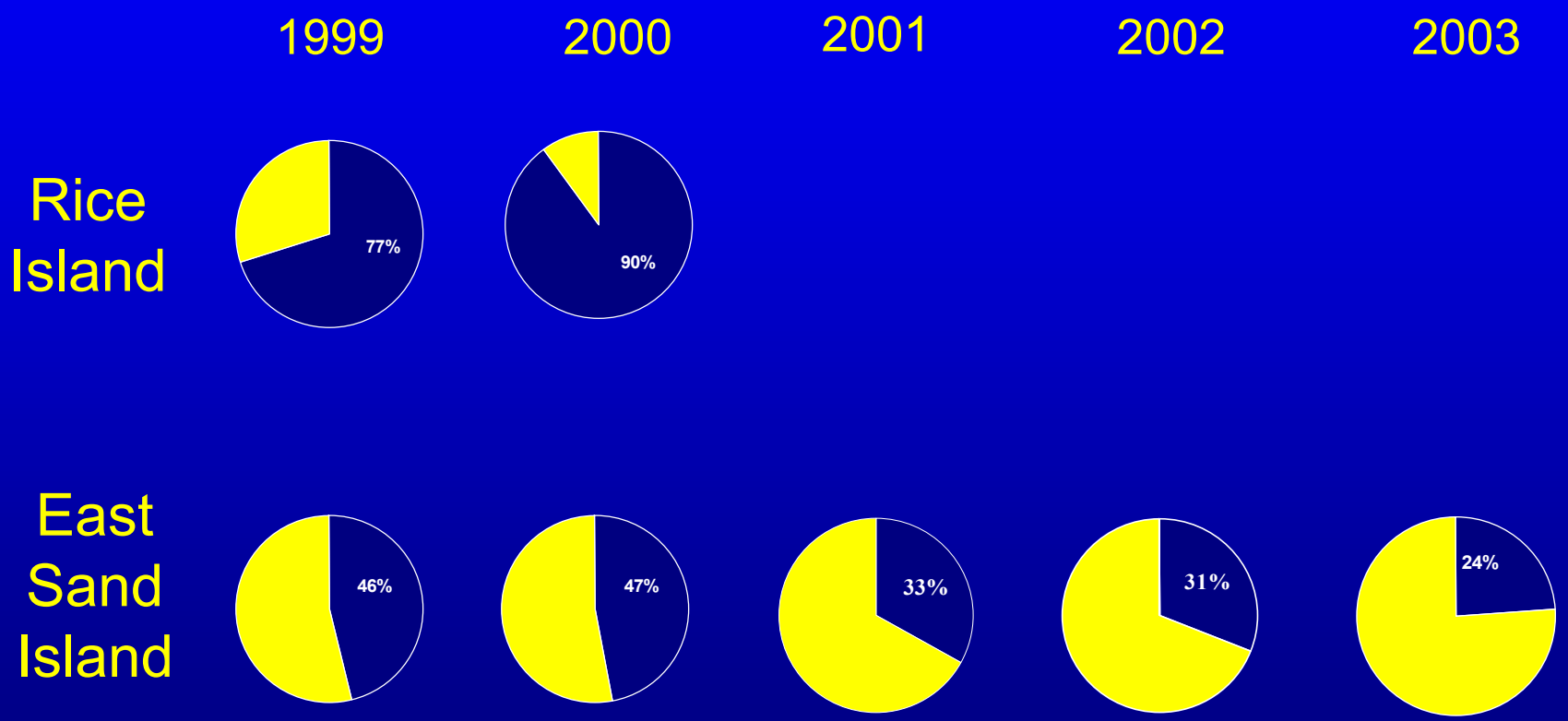
- NOAA Fisheries Biological Opinions on the Federal Columbia River Power System required the Corps of Engineers (Corps) to:
  - identify magnitude of Caspian Tern predation on juvenile salmonids
  - modify habitat on Rice Island to discourage Caspian Tern nesting

Caspian Tern Colony Size
Columbia River Estuary
(Rice and East Sand Islands)

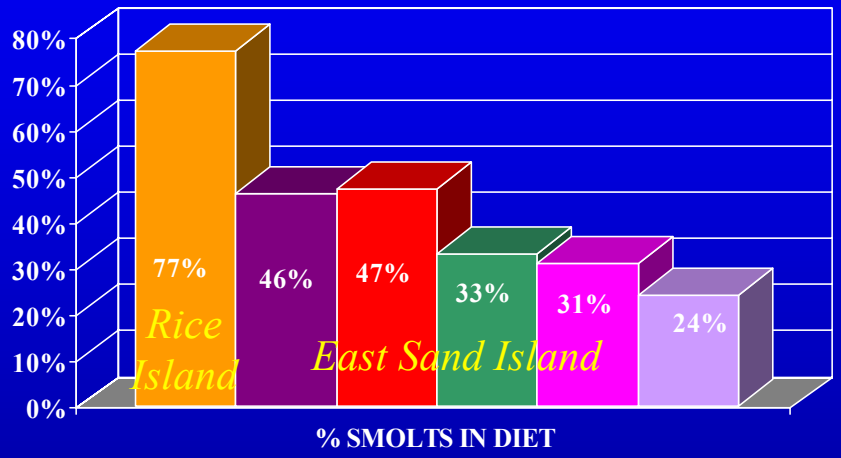


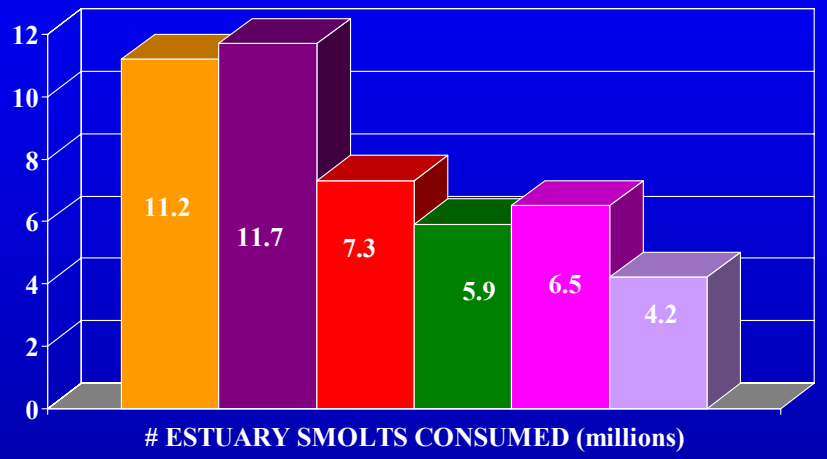
In 1999 and 2000, the Corps relocated Caspian Terns from Rice Island to East Sand Island. Relocation efforts continued through 2003.

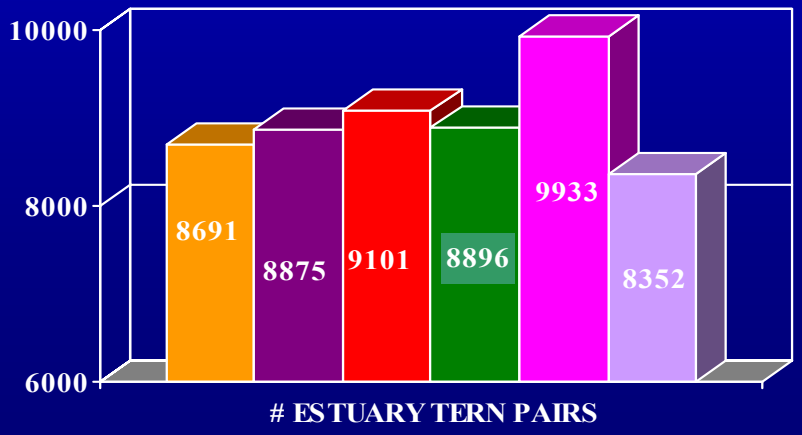
Changes in Caspian Tern Diet Composition



Trends In Response To Management, 1998 - 2003







Lawsuit Summary

- April 2000: National Audubon Society, Defenders of Wildlife, Seattle Audubon, and American Bird Conservancy sued the Corps and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for:
  - inadequate NEPA* compliance (EA* vs. EIS*) for estuary relocation project
  - issuance of a Migratory Bird Treaty Act permit for the take of eggs

*NEPA - National Environmental Policy Act

*EA – Environmental Assessment

*EIS – Environmental Impact Statement

2002 Settlement Agreement

- Maintain 6 acres of habitat on East Sand Island, prevent nesting on Rice Island
- Prepare Caspian tern management plan and EIS for implementation in 2005 (FWS lead agency)
- Complete 3 studies:
  - Predation Analysis (NOAA Fisheries)
  - Tern Status Assessment (FWS)
  - Regional Habitat Feasibility Assessment (FWS)

EIS Alternatives

A: Status quo

- Maintain 6 acres of tern nesting habitat on East Sand Island

B: No Management

- Tern nest site will become vegetated, loss of East Sand Island colony

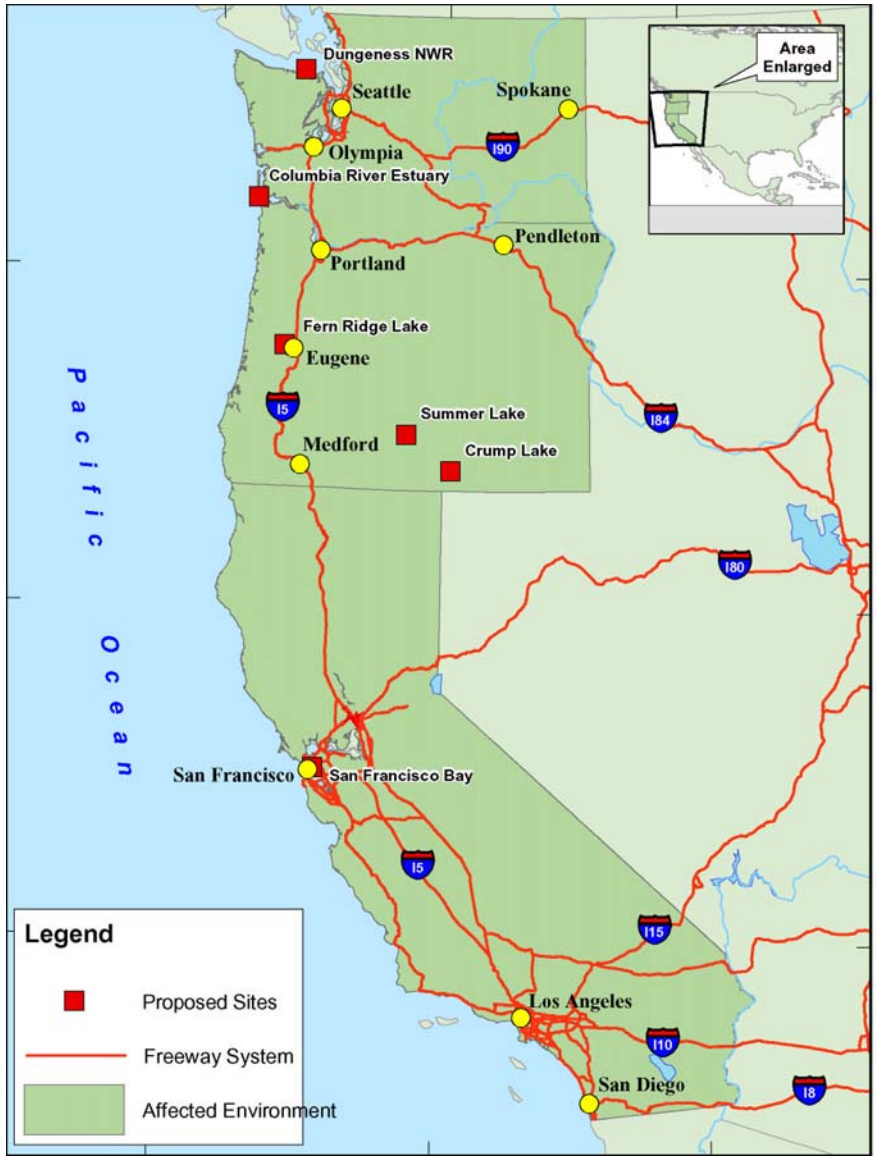
C: Habitat Management & Facilitated Redistribution – Preferred Alternative

- Enhance habitat at alternate sites (in coordination with States)
- Reduce East Sand Island habitat to 1-1.5 acres for 2500-3125 pairs
- Social facilitation to disperse ~5000-6500 pairs to alternate sites

D: Habitat Management / Lethal Control

- Reduce East Sand Island habitat to 1-1.5 acres for 2500-3125 pairs
- Annually kill 1000 - 6000 terns in the Columbia River estuary until proposed range of nesting terns is attained

Alternate Sites Associated with Preferred Alternative



Summary of Environmental Consequences of Preferred Alternative

- 60 – 70% decrease in East Sand Island tern colony size
- Considerable reduction in consumption of juvenile salmonids in Columbia River estuary
- Potential for increase in population growth rate of listed salmonids in Columbia River estuary
- Could temporarily affect tern nesting success and possibly regional population numbers; expected to stabilize over time, possibly at lower than current levels but well above numbers observed in the late 1970s and early 1980s

EIS Timeline

- Scoping began in April 2003
- Draft EIS released on July 23, 2004
- Comment period will last for 60 days (July 23 – September 20, 2004)
- Final EIS projected to be released: January 2005
- ROD projected to be published: February 2005
- Implement Preferred Alternative: March 2005