

Sara Keeler - RE: MEP - Concerns about Ravens over power plant in Anchorage AK

From: "Coltrane, Jessica A (DFG)" <jessica.coltrane@alaska.gov>
To: Doug.Urry@CH2M.com
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Subject: RE: MEP - Concerns about Ravens over power plant in Anchorage AK
CC: Gary.Santolo@CH2M.com; Skeeler@energy.state.ca.us

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Doug,

Sorry it has taken me a bit to get back to you. It is a crazy time of year here, and I'm rarely in the office. It is difficult for me to comment on the relevance of how ravens behave around the Sullivan plant in Anchorage compared to a proposed plant in CA that I have not seen. However, I can at least shed some insight as to why ravens do what they do in Anchorage, if that helps. I spoke with Rick Sinnott regarding this matter, as he was/is our local raven expert. The following is his response to me:

“Ravens are attracted to the thermal updraft at the Sullivan plant for at least two reasons. Ravens engage in pre-roost aerial displays to socialize and share information about roost sites and perhaps food sources. This is primarily a winter (Oct. through March) phenomenon in the Anchorage area.

Anchorage is occupied by scores, or perhaps several hundred ravens, in summer, but nesting and brood-rearing occupy much of the time of territorial pairs, and I have no idea where the non-territorial birds roost, but there is little or no need to roost in large groups in the mountains like they do in winter. In winter, ravens are much more abundant in Anchorage, perhaps several thousand. Many of these ravens roost in the foothills and mountains east of the city. The Sullivan plant is one of the popular pre-roost assembly points because it is between the city and the mountains and it has that nice updraft. I'm not aware of similar large assemblies of ravens at other power plants. This might partially be because other facilities don't have as powerful an updraft, but I suspect the main reason is that they aren't on the way to and from the mountain roost sites like the Sullivan plant is.

However, the other reason why ravens use updrafts is for the sheer fun of it, and to show off to other ravens.

Ravens are commonly seen doing aerial displays around buildings or bluffs with an updraft provided by wind coming from a advantageous quarter. Again, this seems to happen much more in winter than in summer. Their breeding season starts in early winter, and that certainly adds spice to the activity, but ravens can be seen playing in updrafts during other seasons. I see much less of this activity in summer, partly because there are fewer ravens in town, but also because many of the ones that remain in summer are distracted by nesting and brood-rearing.

In summary, the Sullivan plant has several features which attract ravens that are less attractive at other power plants in the area. I can't speak for conditions in other parts of their range because ravens adapt to local environments and perhaps the warm air coming from the Sullivan plant is more "uplifting" in cold conditions, a condition that may not apply in California, for instance. I cannot say for certain that NO ravens will ever be tempted to play in the updraft from a power plant located near Anchorage International airport. It wouldn't be as popular as the Sullivan plant for pre-roost assemblies, but it might occasionally attract some ravens that are goofing off in midtown, especially in winter.”

If you have any further questions, let me know.

Thanks,
 Jessy