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Bay Area birds since 1917

GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY

POSITION STATEMENT CONCERNING ELECTRONIC BILLBOARDS

February 11, 2013

Position:

The Golden Gate Audubon Society objects to, and, where appropriate, will oppose electronic billboards, large neon signs, and other unnecessary sources of environmentally damaging light pollution.

Rationale:

Light pollution is harmful to birds in many ways:

1. Many birds navigate at night by the stars and can be confused by urban lights. Drawn off course by brightly-lit buildings, they may be harmed or killed due to collisions with windows or they may circle buildings and other light sources until exhausted.
2. Studies show that light pollution can cause urban birds to initiate their breeding earlier than their counterparts in rural, less-lit areas. "Our findings show clearly that light pollution influences the timing of breeding behavior, with unknown consequences for bird populations." (*Current Biology*, 16 September 2010, Volume 20, Issue 19, pages 1735-1739) Early breeding can result in the birth of young during unfavorable conditions, including inclement weather and inadequate food supplies.
3. The Fatal Light Awareness Program, which researches bird-building collisions, explains some light-related hazards:

Many species of birds, especially the small insect-eaters, migrate at night. Night-migrating birds use the age-old and constant patterns of light from the moon, the stars, and from the setting sun as navigational tools to follow their migration routes. Artificial city lights interfere with this instinctive behavior and draw night-migrating birds toward brightly-lit buildings in urban areas. ... observations found that once [birds] fly through a lit environment they'll return to that lit source and then hesitate to leave it ... The danger of artificial light to migrating birds is intensified on foggy or rainy nights, when the weather further obscures the night sky, or when cloud cover is low and the birds naturally migrate at lower altitudes. (More info available at: <http://www.flap.org/lights.php>)

4. Golden Gate Audubon does not believe that electronic billboards comply with applicable laws and ordinances. Oakland's Outdoor Lighting Standards section 1.1(C)(6) specifically prohibits them. Moreover, electronic billboards violate the spirit of the Highway Beautification Act and are rightly subject to a legal challenge on that basis.

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2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G Berkeley, California 94702

phone 510.843.2222 fax 510.843.5351 web www.goldengateaudubon.org