



Wayne County news

[E-MAIL THIS STORY](#) | [PRINTER-FRIENDLY FORMAT](#)

U.S., state look into tern loss Downriver

Repairs near bridge may have upset nests

August 14, 2003

BY KIM NORTH SHINE

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

One of the state's largest and last remaining colonies of a threatened bird called the common tern may have been destroyed during construction below the Grosse Ile Toll Bridge this month.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is investigating the Detroit Audubon Society's claims that baby terns were trampled on by workers using a crane and other heavy equipment to repair a free-standing sandy-topped platform. The square platform, or protection pier, rises several feet out of the Detroit River in the shadow of the bridge that connects the upscale Downriver island of Grosse Ile to the mainland near the city of Wyandotte.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is assisting in the investigation.

Separately, an investigator from the Army Corps of Engineers visited the site Wednesday to determine whether the contractor should have requested a permit before starting work, spokeswoman Lynn Duerod said.

The common tern, which looks like a sea gull but is smaller, is considered a threatened species in Michigan. Federally, the common tern is under consideration for the endangered species list, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spokeswoman Rachel Levin said.

The bird travels between northern states such as Michigan and southern destinations such as Brazil. Scientists have used the tern as a barometer for water quality.

The species is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty, which forbids the disturbance of protected birds' nesting grounds.

Tampering with hatchlings or nests can bring a fine of \$2,000 per bird or two years in prison.

Investigators have to determine to what extent the nesting ground was disrupted and whether any birds were killed or eggs destroyed.

Bridge owner Paul Smoke said only a few young birds were nesting when work began at the beginning of August. He said the workers made sure they did not harm the birds.

The contractor, a company Smoke said was called Faust from Allen Park, could not be reached for comment. Smoke described Faust as a "reputable company."

Smoke said he saw adult birds and babies on the pier during construction, which

MARKETPLACE PERSONALS

Whatever you're looking for, MarketplaceDetroit has a match for you.

Join now for a FREE membership

[CLICK HERE](#)



Win Tickets to the premiere
~ CLICK HERE ~
UNDERWORLD

News links >

- [Today's stories](#)
- [Metro](#)
- [Wayne](#)
- [Oakland](#)
- [Macomb](#)
- [Community Free Press](#)
- [Michigan](#)
- [Nation/World](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Children First](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Casinos](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Religion](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Driving Today](#)
- [AP wire](#)
- [Desiree Cooper](#)
- [Brian Dickerson](#)
- [More columnists](#)
- [Special projects](#)

Quick links >

- [Home page](#)
- [Site index](#)
- [View the front page](#)
- [Weather](#)
- [Lottery](#)
- [Comics](#)
- [Photos](#)
- [Movie listings](#)
- [Restaurant guide](#)
- [Search](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Death notices](#)
- [Personals](#)
- [Auto news](#)
- [Newspaper subscriptions](#)
- [About the Free](#)

More Wayne County news >

- [Newlywed shot dead at his Detroit home](#)
- [Safe Night kids event needs \\$50,000 for expenses](#)
- [U.S., state look into tern loss Downriver](#)

[More stories >](#)

[Press](#)
[Jobs at the Free](#)
[Press](#)
[Bookstore](#)

ended late last week. A tugboat damaged the pier in March.

"I don't know if they moved them or not. I was told they saw babies around the sides of the pier and they saw the parents feeding them," said Smoke, who owns the Grosse Ile Bridge Company, which operates the two-lane toll bridge.

He said he wasn't aware the terns were a protected species.

The Detroit Audubon Society maintains that at least 60 baby birds, many still several weeks from flying, were counted on July 17, and it said young dead birds have been seen down river.

"There's more than enough evidence to indicate they would have destroyed the young," said Jim Bull, Detroit Audubon Society president.

"What's sad is we're talking about one of the last remnants on the Detroit River. It's a particular irony that they're called the common tern," said Bull, who as a child banded terns on Grosse Ile, Boblo Island and other downriver islands with his birding father, who was also active in the Audubon Society.

The Grosse Ile terns that are the subject of the investigation lay eggs in the rocky sand on the protection pier. The pier is made of corrugated metal and placed beside and below the bridge near its midpoint to protect the bridge's center span from boats and ice.

Another, smaller colony of terns lives at the free bridge to the island further south. No construction work was done there.

The terns on the toll bridge have forged a successful breeding ground even as their habitat has disappeared in other places.

Bull and a Michigan Tech student working on his master's thesis on common terns counted at least 60 young on July 17, Bull said.

The same colony was part of a Great Lakes census taken last year, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biologist Dave Best said.

At that time, 122 nests were counted, making the colony the third largest in the state, Best said.

"This is a sizeable, important colony," Best said.

Best said the terns may return if the habitat is restored to its previous form.

Smoke said he doubts there will be long-term damage to the colony.

"These birds have been nesting there through many modifications throughout my lifetime," Smoke said. "And they always come back."

Contact KIM NORTH SHINE at 313-223-4557 or kshine@freepress.com.



[email this](#) | [print this](#)

[Home](#)

[News](#)

[Sports](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Business](#)

[Features](#)

[Opinion](#)

[Tech](#)

[Marketplace](#)

>KNIGHT RIDDER >

INFORMATION FOR LIFE

Copyright © 2003 Detroit Free Press Inc. All rights reserved.