

# BAY BIRD REVIEW

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION ON THE SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS



SAN FRANCISCO BAY  
BIRD OBSERVATORY

## Director's Message

On October 23rd, we held our 30th Annual Membership Meeting at the South Bay Yacht Club in Alviso, California. Members approved amendments to our bylaws and a slate of directors, including Board Chair Troy Rahmig for his second term and Shannon McMahon (Secretary), Brian Fulfroost, Tom Stewart, and Executive Director Jill Demers for their first term. We celebrated 30 years of history with a presentation by Pati Rouzer, Past Board Chair. We also introduced our membership to a new program that will shape the future of SFBBO and our effectiveness in achieving our mission to conserve birds and their habitats through science and outreach: the Habitats Program.

Led by Senior Ecologist David Thomson, the Habitats Program is a science-based program that works to determine feasible meth-

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *continued on page 2*



OUR 30TH ANNUAL Membership Meeting at the South Bay Yacht Club in Alviso.



CALIFORNIA GULLS *formerly nesting on Pond A6.*

PHOTO BY MICHAEL KERN

## Science Report

### Gull Management in a New Landscape

The former salt evaporation ponds in the San Francisco Bay provide important breeding habitat for waterbirds, including the federally threatened Western Snowy Plover, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, and Forster's Tern. California Gulls also breed on the ponds; their breeding population in the Bay has grown from 24 birds in 1980 to over 46,000 in 2010. In December 2010, the levees surrounding the largest California Gull colony, Pond A6, were breached as part of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project. Pond A6 is now flooded during each high tide, displacing 24,000 gulls from breeding in the pond. In an effort to manage the breeding dispersal of the displaced California Gulls in Spring 2011, the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory partnered with the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge to intensively survey all potential California Gull breeding habitat in the South Bay and prevent their nesting in designated ecologically sensitive areas through hazing. Sensitive areas included Western Snowy

Plover breeding sites, Forster's Tern colonies, and the newly created islands on Pond SF<sub>2</sub> in Menlo Park.

Through our surveys, we documented a new colony on the levee between Ponds A9/A14 near the Alviso Marina County Park, where many of the displaced California Gulls likely bred. This colony was the largest in the South Bay in 2011 with 11,596 nesting gulls. We re-sighted 39 gulls previously banded as breeding adults in the A6 colony nesting in the A9/A14 colony, and documented that two other local colonies doubled in size. Overall, the number of breeding California Gulls decreased to 38,000 in 2011.

California Gulls attempted to breed at the Warm Springs Complex, an ecologically sensitive area that includes Western Snowy Plover nesting ponds. We successfully prevented the California Gulls from nesting at the site by repeatedly hazing gulls. This included walking through the area and blowing a whistle to flush the gulls. We did not allow gulls to return to the area for an hour, and we

SCIENCE REPORT *continued on page 2*

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE *from cover*

ods to restore and manage a rare and valuable habitat—the upland transition zone, or the ecotone, between a tidal marsh and upland habitats. A transition zone that is dominated by high-quality native vegetation provides high-tide refugia and cover for endangered species like California Clapper Rail and Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse. SFBBO's first Habitats Program project will be restoration and vegetation management of 13 acres of transitional habitat in pond A6 in Alviso. Pond A6, the former home to 24,000 breeding California Gulls, was breached in December 2010 to initiate the restoration of tidal habitats. This project will be the largest attempt in the Bay Area to restore and manage a transitional habitat. Keep an eye out for more information about the Habitats Program in future issues of the *Bay Bird Review*, or visit Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge's Environmental Education Center in Alviso to see the upland transitional zone restoration David has been working on there.

And lastly, we extend a special thanks to Pati Rouzer, Past Chair, for her six years of service on the Board of Directors. Pati just finished her second and last term as a Director. She came to SFBBO in 2006 with a love of nature, a fascination with birds and a desire to further understand avian ecology. Her wealth of knowledge of local avian conservation and her experience in finance have guided the organization in many ways. Thank you Pati for all your support!

*By Jill Bluso Demers, SFBBO Executive Director*



PATI ROUZER, *Past Chair and Troy Rahmig, Chair. Photo by Patty McGann.*

## Staff and Board Migrations

We would like to say welcome to the following members of our Staff and Board of Directors.

### *Welcome Tom Stewart*

Tom is a California native who moved to the Bay Area in 1975. Academically trained as a theoretical mathematician, Tom is a systems engineer who develops telecommunications systems. Tom began bird watching in the 1970s, and discovered SFBBO in 2002. He began participating in the annual California Fall Challenge Fundraiser and banding birds at the Coyote Creek Field Station (CCFS). "I rely on SFBBO as a component in balancing my life between the technical intricacies of my work and the reality of living in a challenged ecosystem," he said. "Through SFBBO, I got involved with field studies of bats, spending many nights mist netting Yuma bats at Coyote Creek, and have taken two trips to the Sea of Cortez studying Mexican Fishing Bats. I now say that my recreation consists of my five B's—books, birds, bats, bicycles and Balboa (a type of swing dance)." Tom continues to band birds at CCFS, and has monitored breeding colonies of terns and herons as part of SFBBO's Colonial Waterbird Program. "SFBBO has become a very important part of my life," he said, "and I hope that I can further support it through the Board of Directors."



### *Welcome David Thomson*

David Thomson is a senior ecologist leading our Habitats Program. David has a B.S. in Biology from Seattle University in Washington and an M.S. in Wetland Ecology from Southeastern Louisiana University, where he contributed to and led research on coastal wetlands. Since moving to California in 2001, he has actively researched the ecology and restoration of wetlands in San Francisco Bay, including an ongoing study to develop methods and materials for restoring tidal marsh-upland ecotonal habitats. The methods he has developed are being utilized to restore habitats at sites throughout the estuary as a part of the tidal marsh ecosystem's restoration. David hopes to contribute to our understanding of bird habitat ecology and enrich our research programs with this perspective.



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### SCIENCE REPORT *from cover*

conducted hazing activities twice a day during the nest initiation period. By persistently using these methods, we successfully prevented California Gulls from breeding in this location.

Although the California Gull population in the South Bay decreased in 2011, gulls continue to be a management concern in the San Francisco Bay. We were successful in deterring gulls from nesting in one sensitive area in 2011; however, they may attempt to nest again in the future at other sensitive areas. In coming years, SFBBO will continue to monitor the California Gulls to track the population and identify potential conflicts with other breeding waterbirds.



CALIFORNIA GULL nesting on former Pond A6.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL KERN

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*By Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen, SFBBO Waterbird Program Director*

# Restoring the Wild Heart of the South Bay

For over a hundred years, thousands of acres of south San Francisco Bay were drained and diked for salt production. In 2003, under the leadership of Senator Dianne Feinstein, the South Bay Salt Ponds were purchased from Cargill, Inc., using state, federal and private funds.

Over the ensuing five years, hundreds of individuals, recreational groups, scientists, environmental and business organizations, and public agencies devoted thousands of hours in developing a 50-year restoration plan. The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project is the largest wetlands restoration project on the West Coast. In addition to restoration of tidal wetland and enhancement of pond habitat, the Project will improve flood protection and expand public access and recreational opportunities for the over 3 million residents of the South Bay.

Since restoration began in 2008, most of the former salt ponds' levees have been fitted with tidal gates, and several levees have been breached. The Project has opened over 2,000 acres of ponds to the Bay (with another 630 due to be opened this fall), constructed nesting habitat in some ponds, and opened an important section of the Bay Trail.

Three years into implementation, researchers are already seeing significant increases in the types and numbers of fish and birds—from herring and

anchovies to pintail ducks—inhabiting the restored ponds. Bay mud is accumulating much faster than anticipated in the breached ponds, forming the foundation for re-establishment of tidal marsh plants like pickleweed and cordgrass.

Research underway on the newly breached and re-configured ponds includes:

## *Pond SF<sub>2</sub> (Ravenswood)*

**Trail Study (USGS and San Jose State University):** Researchers are studying the impact of the new trails on waterfowl feeding and roosting. The impact of the SF<sub>2</sub> trail on nesting waterbirds will also be evaluated by monitoring nest performance (survival, clutch size, initiation date) and distance from a disturbance feature such as the trail or viewing platforms.

**Nesting Islands Study (USGS, SFBBO):** The 30 islands constructed at Pond SF<sub>2</sub> are also the subjects of study looking at waterbird nesting. This includes taking specific measurements of the islands, water levels, pond elevations and weekly nest monitoring (marking nest, noting clutch size and nest fate). The islands will also be observed for the number of roosting birds. These studies should provide information on island design and location to optimize bird roosting and reproductive success.

## *Pond A8 (Alviso)*

**Mercury Study (USGS, UC Davis):** Researchers are studying mercury methylation and bioaccumulation at this pond, as well as in Alviso Slough area. They are monitoring nests of two species, Forster's Tern and American Avocet, and collecting eggs for mercury analysis. Forage fish that these bird species eat, as well as sediment and water samples, are also being collected and analyzed for mercury. All of these data should reveal if legacy mercury from the upstream New Almaden Quicksilver mine, which has deposited in Pond A8 and surrounding areas, is being made more available in the food chain, resulting in mercury bioaccumulation in bird eggs and negative impacts on Bay water quality.



A SALT POND landscape in Alviso.

## *Pond A6 (Alviso)*

**Sediment Study (University of San Francisco, H.T. Harvey):** With the opening of this pond, researchers are studying the sedimentation rates over time in order to monitor how quickly the pond converts to tidal marsh.

## **California Gull Study (USGS, SFBBO):**

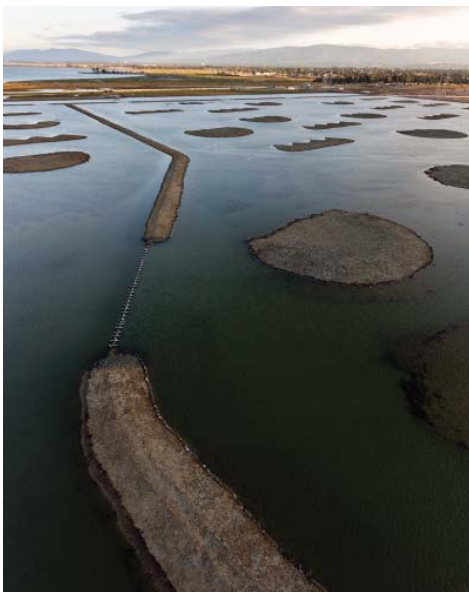
A major question with the tidal restoration of this pond is the destination of the approximately 23,000 breeding pairs of California Gulls that have nested in Pond A6 for several years. Researchers have banded over 500 California Gull chicks and are actively monitoring their movements this season to see if they relocate to other existing colonies, or if they set up new colonies in San Francisco Bay or elsewhere. Researchers are also studying Snowy Plover nest depredation and Forster's Tern chick depredation by California Gulls to determine if dispersal of gulls from restoration at Pond A6 increases depredation on these bird species.

## *Project-wide Ongoing Monitoring*

All of these newly restored ponds, along with adjacent sloughs and channels, will be monitored every other month for fish communities using these areas. The entire project area is also having satellite images taken once per year and changes in vegetation and habitat are being determined.

.....  
*By John Bourgeois, Executive Project Manager,  
South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project*

*Want to know more about the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project? Visit their website at [www.southbayrestoration.org](http://www.southbayrestoration.org) or follow them on Facebook.*



POND SF<sub>2</sub> (see field trip to SF<sub>2</sub> on page 6).

# 2011 Click Off Photo Contest

The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory's 3rd Annual Click Off Photo Contest received more than 460 images. The purpose of the photo contest was to promote our mission of the conservation of birds and their habitats, raise funds for the Bird Observatory, and to introduce the active Bay Area bird photography community to the Bird Observatory's science and outreach efforts.

Photographers entered their work into six categories: Bird Portraits, Birds in their Habitat, Bird Behavior, Endangered Species, Human Interaction, and Birds of the World. One image in each category was selected as a Category Winner. Several other standout images were awarded Honorable Mentions. From these images, a final award, the People's Choice Award, was selected by the members who attended the Annual Meeting on October 23rd, 2011. Congratulations to Binu John, who won this year's People's Choice Award for his photo titled "Mommy I'm Hungry."

"I took this photo of a family of Pied-billed Grebes this year at the Sandy Wool lake at the Ed Levin park in Milpitas," said Binu. "I was eager to get there to see them soon after I heard about them from one of my friends. The very next weekend, I got there early. After locating them, I laid down on the ground with my camera and slowly crawled towards the lake in anticipation of capturing the interaction between the mother and the



MOMMY I'M HUNGRY, *Bird Behavior Category Winner and People's Choice Winner* photo by Binu John.

babies from their eye level. Within the next couple of hours, I captured this interesting moment of the feeding."

The People's Choice winner will be able to spend a day in the field photographing with a Bird Observatory scientist. Category Winners will spend a weekend at Bruce Finocchio's Ramrod Ranch in Monterey County, which has been set up for Bird Blind Photography. Photographers receiving Honorable Mention were awarded \$25 gift certificates to Borrow Lenses.

Staff also selected their top five "Staff Picks" of the winners. Those winners received a "Guide to Songbird Set-Up

Photography" CD by Alan Murphy.

We would like to thank ThinkTank Photo for donating a StreetWalker Pro Backpack for our contest. The backpack was auctioned along with prints of the category winning images at our 30th Annual Meeting on October 23rd.

Special thanks to Michael Kern, Rebecca Jackrel and Bruce Finocchio for their unlimited dedication, contributions and guidance in managing this wonderful contest!

You can view our "Winners Gallery" at [www.sfbbo.org/clickoff](http://www.sfbbo.org/clickoff).

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By Stephanie Ellis, SFBBO Outreach Director



RED-BILLED HORNBILL, *Birds of the World Category Winner* by Conrad Tan.



SHOREBIRD NATION, *Bird Portraits Category Winner* by Ingrid Taylor.



CRANES AND FLOWERS, *Birds in Their Habitat* Category Winner by Robert Lewis.



BURROWING OWL DISPLAYING, *Endangered Species* Category Winner by Eleanor Briccetti.

## A Gift for the Birds

A Gift in Honor is a great way to recognize a special person or family for the holidays. For each \$25 Gift in Honor donation, we will promptly send a beautiful, personalized tribute card to you, or to the person or family you indicate, to notify them of your thoughtful donation. This card features a full-color photograph of a Wood Duck by Conrad Tan. This photograph received an Honorable Mention in the Bird Portrait Category of our 2011 Click Off Photo Contest.

Your donation will support our scientific research and monitoring projects that conserve birds and their habitats. All donations are tax deductible. Contact us at 408.946.6548 and let us know how many cards you wish to send. Mail a check in the amount of your choice or make a secure online donation at [www.sfbbo.org](http://www.sfbbo.org). Thank you for celebrating a loved one by conserving birds.



WOOD DUCK by Conrad Tan.

## 2011 Click Off Winners

All Category Winner photos are highlighted in this edition of the *Bay Bird Review*.

### BIRD BEHAVIOR

**Category Winner and People's Choice Winner** – "Mommy I'm Hungry" by Binu John

**Honorable Mention** – *Inside the Flock* by Mark Rauzon; *Grandstanding Goldeneye* by Steve Zamek; *Gone Fishing* by Ashutosh Sinha; *Glaucous Gulls Feast on Thick-billed Murre* by Robert Heil; "Hey! Don't Forget About Me!" by Catherine Dobbins d'Alessio; "Get Out of My Face!" by Joe Messina

### HUMAN INTERACTION

**Category Winner** – "Can't You Read?" by Catherine Dobbins d'Alessio

**Honorable Mention** – *Photographers Assistant* by Rob Lewis; *Human, You're Too Close* by Jon d'Alessio; *Spectators* by Karthik Dwarakanath

### BIRDS IN THEIR HABITAT

**Category Winner** – *Cranes and Flowers* by Robert Lewis

**Honorable Mention** – *Tree Swallow Looking Out of Nest* by Pamela Condos; *Lincoln's Sparrow* by Ashutosh Sinha; *Long-billed Dowitchers* by Indranil Sircar; *Whooper Swans* by Jon d'Alessio; *Greater Roadrunner* by Joe Messina; *How the Pigeon Took Manhattan* by Annette Herz; *Spring Song* by Ashutosh Sinha

### BIRD PORTRAITS

**Category Winner** – *Shorebird Nation* by Ingrid Taylar

**Honorable Mention** – *Anna's Hummingbird Stretching* by Eleanor Briccetti; *Innocence* by Nagesh Mullah; *Preening Time* by Edward Nguyen; *Wood Duck* by Conrad Tan; *The Evening Breeze* by Ricky Pan; "Just Me and Mom Hanging Out" by Catherine Dobbins d'Alessio

### ENDANGERED SPECIES

**Category Winner** – *Burrowing Owl Displaying* by Eleanor Briccetti

**Honorable Mention** – *Short-tailed Albatross* by Glen Tepke; *Courting Dance of Endangered Japanese Red-crowned Cranes* by Catherine Dobbins d'Alessio; *Western Snowy Plover in Breeding Plumage* by Vivek Khanzodé

### BIRDS OF THE WORLD

**Category Winner** – *Red-billed Hornbill* by Conrad Tan

**Honorable Mention** – *Adelie Penguins Diving* by Eleanor Briccetti; *Resplendent Quetzal, Costa Rica* by Vivek Khanzodé; *Black-legged Kittiwake Skims the Frigid Arctic Waters* by Robert Heil; *Eurasian Oystercatcher Feeding Young* by Joerg Rockenberger

# Calendar

## WINTER BAYSIDE BIRDING

Saturday, January 21st, 2012

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

SITE: SOUTH BAY

Join SFBBO's Outreach Director Stephanie Ellis and local birder Richard Jeffers for a fun morning of winter birding along the Bay. We will start at the Alviso Marina and hit several locations including Sunnyvale and Mountain View in search of gulls, waterfowl, shorebirds and more. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the Bird Observatory's Science, Habitats, and Outreach Programs. RSVP required.



## BUILT IT FOR THE BIRDS

Saturday, February 18th, 2012

9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

SITE: DON EDWARDS SF BAY NTL. WILDLIFE REFUGE; POND SF2, MENLO PARK

Refuge Docent Jane Moss and SFBBO Waterbird Program Director Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen lead a 1-mile walk through the ever-changing panoramas surrounding a former salt pond. Learn about the exciting ways this area is being reshaped as newly created wildlife habitat. Caitlin will discuss SFBBO's Snowy Plover monitoring at SF2. Trail is easy and level. RSVP required.



**WALK:** Open to the public; \$10 donation requested for non-members. RSVP at outreach@sfbbo.org or 408.946.6548



**ACCESSIBLE:** Contact outreach@sfbbo.org or 408.946.6548.




**SPECIAL EVENT**



**MEMBER-ONLY ACTIVITY:** Active SFBBO membership required to attend event.

## We've changed our membership benefits!

Events designated by this symbol  indicate that this is a member-only event; you must have an active membership to attend this event.

To check your membership status or to RSVP, call 408.946.6548 and we will be happy to assist you!



"CAN'T YOU READ?" Human Interaction Category Winner by Catherine Dobbins d'Alessio.

## Workshops for the Birder and Naturalist – 2012

WITH: *Alvaro Jaramillo, SFBBO Senior Biologist* SITE: *Sobrato Center for Nonprofits in Redwood City*

Tuesday, January 31st (instruction), 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Thursday, February 2nd (instruction), 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Saturday, February 4th (field trip)

### GULL WORKSHOP

We live in a gull-rich part of the world, but gulls can be a challenge to identify. This workshop will help you understand the general concepts of gull identification to give you the confidence to go out there and give the local gulls a name and age. Apart from identification, we will touch on topics such as human influence on gull distribution, the impact of gulls on other breeding birds, gull behavior, and migration. Learn about SFBBO's California Gull research and how gull populations are changing in the South Bay.

*Birding Level: Intermediate and up. \$150 fee.*



Tuesday, February 21st (instruction), 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Thursday, February 23rd (instruction), 6:30 – 9:00 pm;

Saturday, February 25th (field trip)

### SPARROWS — THE LITTLE BROWN JOBS

Well-camouflaged and perfectly adapted to living near the ground, sparrows are often categorized as "little brown jobs" by birders. By concentrating on differences in shape, behavior, voice and habitat, sparrows can be easier to identify than you think. Sparrows afford scientists important opportunities to study bird song, dialects, territoriality, and migration patterns. Gain an appreciation for this largely North American group of birds, their natural history, and their influence on ornithology.

*Birding Level: Beginner and up. \$150 fee.*



# Our thanks to these supporters of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory!



*Thank you new and returning members, and generous donors, July – September 2011*

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And thank you to the 51 people who gave up to \$39.

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Jacqueline Deely, Janet and Jay Hanson, Jan Hintermeister, Sheri Howe, Jennifer Rycenga, Jane Such

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*BAY BIRD REVIEW is published quarterly by the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. Deadline for submissions is five weeks prior to the start of the quarter. Contact the editor at outreach@sfbbo.org for submission guidelines. Please send address changes to the office.*

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## Message of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is the time of year to reflect on what we are thankful for. At SFBBO, we are thankful for YOU! Your support through gifts and volunteering enables us to continue our research and monitoring projects. These projects are crucial to the conservation of birds and management of healthy avian habitats. We are grateful for your continued support and dedication to SFBBO.



SAN FRANCISCO BAY  
BIRD OBSERVATORY

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## Thank you to our 15th Annual California Fall Challenge Sponsors & Donors!

The 2011 California Fall Challenge has come to a close. This annual event is the Bird Observatory's largest fundraiser. What a wonderful whirlwind of activities! Between September 10th and October 9th we offered 11 guided birding trips in four different counties. Our Mewaldt Cup Bird-a-Thon fostered competition from around the state.

This year, the Refugees (Mike Rogers, Mike Mammoser, Richard Jeffers and Francis Toldi) won the Mewaldt Cup with 163 species seen in San Mateo and Santa Clara County. Nice work, Refugees!

We thank all who participated or donated during our California Fall Challenge!

### MEWALDT CUP WINNERS

The Refugees: Richard Jeffers, Mike Mammoser, Mike Rogers, and Francis Toldi.

### BIRD-A-THON PARTICIPANTS:

David Rice, Kay Loughman and Helen Green; SLO Swifts – Maggie Smith and Doug Stinson; Denise Wight and Allison Nelson; Slack Bimmers – Jan Hintermeister, Karen DeMello and Tom Stewart; Refugees – Mike Rogers, Mike



MEWALDT CUP WINNERS: *The Refugees* (from left) Richard Jeffers, Mike Mammoser and Mike Rogers (Francis Toldi not present). Left: Stephanie Ellis, Outreach Director, Right: Jill Demers, Executive Director.

PHOTO BY PATTY MCGANN

Mammoser, Francis Toldi and Richard Jeffers; MBBE Overdrive – Bob Power, Mary Wisnewski, Bill Walker and Eli Gross; Charles Coston, Sandy Gant and Hazel Donaldson

### TOP FUNDRAISERS

Mike Mammoser, Richard Jeffers, Steven Patt, Allison Nelson, Charles Coston, Matthew Dodder, Jan Hintermeister, Karen DeMello, Lisa Myers, Mike Rogers, Robin Leong

### FALL CHALLENGE GUIDED TRIP LEADERS

Alvaro Jaramillo, Caitlin Robinson-Nilsen, Bob Power, Mike Rogers, Lisa Myers, Karen DeMello and Kay Partelow, Rich Cimino, Matthew Dodder, Scott Terrill, Ryan Phillips, Denise Wight

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