

Natural Resources Survey/Assessment

Miller Road Solar, LLC & Miller Road Solar West,
LLC
Miller Road
Town of East Greenbush and Schodack, New York

July 31, 2023

Prepared by:

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ecological Solutions, LLC completed a natural resources survey on a 5 acre section of a site containing approximately 198 ± acres located on Miller Road in the Town of East Greenbush and Schodack, Rensselaer County New York (*Figure 1*). The proposed project consists of developing a portion of a ±198 acre parcel in both the Town of Schodack and East Greenbush, with a grid-tied community solar array. The proposed solar development will occur within the Town of East Greenbush, while the access road is proposed within the Town of Schodack. The parcels are further identified as Parcel IDs 167.00-4-36 & 37.

The overall proposed project will cover +/- 59.22 acres (fenced in areas and access road). The solar fields have been divided into two separate projects - Miller Road Solar and Miller Road Solar West. Miller Road Solar is proposed to be 4.875 MW-AC and Miller Road Solar West is proposed to be 4.975 MW-AC. A chain link fence surrounds the perimeter of the proposed solar areas on the lot. A porous stone access road will be installed for construction and maintenance of the proposed facility. The solar fields are proposed to connect to the grid at an existing utility pole South of the site.

The data contained in this report was gathered on July 28, 2023. The fieldwork totaled approximately 4 man hours. Weather was extremely hot and humid. The proposed solar array area will impact about 1 acre of upland forest out of a total of 100 acres of upland forest on the site. The 1 acre of forest is a strip of forest or hedgerow immediately surrounded by agricultural field and was the focus of the survey in July and occurs generally at the center of the array. A proposed underground utility line to the array was also reviewed. The purpose of the July survey was to document existing vegetation and habitat cover types, plant species, and wildlife species on the approximately 5 acres of project area on the site.

The Hudson Valley Natural Resource Mapper was consulted and the project area is not known to contain rare aquatic animals, plants, wetland resources, significant natural communities, or significant biodiversity areas.

Wetlands on the site were delineated by others and were not assessed since only the wooded hedgerow and agricultural area was the focus of this assessment.

2.0 METHODS

2.1 Agency Correspondence/Inquiry

As part of the environmental review for the subject site, Ecological Solutions, LLC, reviewed the Environmental Assessment Form Mapper regarding the status of rare, threatened, or endangered species on the site. The mapper indicates that there are no known threatened, or endangered species located on or in the vicinity of the site.

The review area of the site was reviewed to determine if marbled salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*), Jefferson salamander (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*), or blue spotted salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*) all NYSDEC designated "species of special concern" utilized the location for any life activity. Other species of special concern including spotted turtle (*Clemmys guttata*) and wood turtle (*Clemmys insculpta*) were also searched for during the survey. Surveys for these species typically occurs in April, May, and June.

2.2 Ecological Community and Habitat Field Inventory

The vegetation inventory included identification of ecological communities or habitat cover types. Cover type surveys were conducted by first reviewing aerial photographs of the site and adjacent properties and subsequently by investigating the habitats on the site to identify and classify each. Within each cover type, visual searches for herbaceous and woody plant species or parts thereof, including leaves, bark, twigs, seeds, flowers, fruits, or other identifiable plant structures were conducted to identify and document vegetation on the site. Trees, shrubs, and fall flowering plants were identified to species levels where possible.

The Plot Transect method was employed for the vegetation inventory. The methods used to search for species on the site are outlined in *Biodiversity Assessment Manual for the Hudson River Estuary Corridor*.

2.2.1 Rare Plants

Specific surveys for rare plants were conducted during July in the subject area. There were no State listed threatened, endangered, or rare species identified in the area.

2.3 Wildlife Field Inventory

Seasonally limited field surveys were conducted for wildlife species including mammals, birds, and herpetiles (reptiles and amphibians).

Multiple methods were used in these surveys, as multiple methodologies increase the potential accuracy of surveys. Methods used are outlined below.

A. **Mammals.** The following survey methods that are outlined in detail in *Biodiversity Assessment Manual for the Hudson River Estuary Corridor* were utilized during the field survey:

1. Sign search, in which the observer records any recognizable signs (tracks, droppings, hair, bones, etc.) of mammal species.
2. Opportunistic mammal sightings, in which the observer identifies mammals encountered in the field at random.

Mammals were identified based on visual encounters, vocalizations, tracks, fur, bones, rubs, scrapes, droppings, and other recognizable signs in habitats throughout the site. Sampling routes were established throughout the project area and wildlife was recorded as encountered.

B. **Birds.** Field methods used to survey for avian species were based on methods outlined in *Biodiversity Assessment Manual for the Hudson River Estuary Corridor* and included:

1. Walking transects where the observer records all species encountered (seen/heard) along a trail.
2. Opportunistic bird sighting, where the observer records birds encountered randomly.
3. Sign search, where the observer records signs (feathers, nests, droppings, tracks, etc.) of birds encountered in the field.

Birds were detected and identified by visual encounter with individuals, vocalizations, tracks, feathers, bones, droppings, castings, nests, drillings, or other recognizable signs.

A breeding bird survey was completed during the July visit and utilized the Cornell University Merlin App. May and June are the months when most birds in New York breed, although a small number of species breed anytime from January through August. June can be especially productive since many adults with food for young and recently fledged young can be seen at that time. The NYS Breeding Bird Atlas (NYSBBA) was consulted to determine avian species that could potentially occupy or use the site. Block 6071A of the NYSBBA is attached to the end of this report

C. **Herptiles (Reptiles and Amphibians).** Field methods used to survey for herptile species were based on methods outlined in *Biodiversity Assessment Manual for the Hudson River Estuary Corridor* and included:

1. Log rolling (overturning logs, large stones, and other debris to reveal herptiles underneath).
2. Aural surveys were conducted for vocal herptiles. Herptiles were detected and identified by visual encounter, vocalizations, spermatophores, egg masses, and remains.
3. Just about the time most other amphibians are looking for places to hibernate, marbled salamanders are heading to breeding areas. The only fall breeding salamander, they seek out small areas (micro habitats) with temperatures around 60°F. The female will lay an average of 100 eggs in a nest constructed in a shallow depression under leaf litter or in a log. The female remains with the eggs until fall rains fill the nest site. Eggs will hatch within two weeks. In mild winters, larvae can feed and grow and transform in late spring or early summer. If the nest does not flood, eggs will go dormant until the following spring. The salamander larvae that hatch in fall metamorphose into terrestrial adults in late spring or June or July. The habitat they select varies with the season. During the spring and summer, the adults spend their time in sandy upland deciduous forests. They seek shelter under logs or in underground tunnels of other animals. In autumn, they congregate in groups near lowland forested habitat to breed.

Both Jefferson and blue spotted salamanders are early spring breeders and are often the first amphibians found breeding in vernal pools.

3.0 FINDINGS

3.1 Habitat

There are several distinct dominant cover types identified in the project area on the site. Approximate physical impacts to each habitat type are shown and listed in *Table 1* as identified in the project Environmental Assessment Form.

TABLE 1
HABITAT COVER TYPE IMPACTS (Entire Site)

NO.		ACRES IDENTIFIED (APPROXIMATE)	PROPOSED IMPACTS
1	Mixed Upland Forest	100	1
2	Agricultural Field	120	49

3.1-1 Terrestrial System

The terrestrial system consists of upland habitats. These habitats have well-drained soils that are dry to mesic (never hydric), and vegetative cover that is never predominantly hydrophytic, even if the soil surface is occasionally or seasonally flooded or saturated. In other words, this is a broadly defined system that includes everything except aquatic, wetland, and subterranean communities.

OPEN UPLANDS

This subsystem includes upland communities with less than 25% canopy cover of trees; the dominant species in these communities are shrubs, herbs, or cryptogamic plants (mosses, lichens, etc.). Three distinctive physiognomic types are included in this subsystem. Grasslands include communities that are dominated by grasses and sedges; they may include scattered shrubs (never more than 50% cover of shrubs), and scattered trees (usually less than one tree per acre, or 3 trees per hectare). Meadows include communities with forbs, grasses, sedges, and shrubs codominant; they may include scattered trees. Shrublands include communities that are dominated by shrubs (more than 50% cover of shrubs); they may include scattered trees.

Agricultural Field

The agricultural area on the site are dominated by forbs and grasses. The field crop community was dominated by the following species: Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), winter wheat (*Triticum aestivum*),

birds-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), spotted knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe*), and orchard grass (*Dactylis glomerata*).

FORESTED UPLANDS

This subsystem includes upland communities with more than 60% canopy cover of trees; these communities occur on substrates with less than 50% rock outcrop or shallow soil over bedrock.

Mixed Upland Forest Community

The mixed upland forest community was dominated by the following species: black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), tatarian honeysuckle (*Lonicera tatarica*), common buckthorn, (*Rhamnus cathartica*), orchardgrass (*Dactylis glomerata*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*), calico aster (*Symphotrichum lateriflorum*), birds-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), red oak (*Quercus rubra*), summer grape (*Vitis aestivalis*), hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), and eastern woodland sedge (*Carex blanda*), red pine (*Pinus resinosa*), red oak (*Quercus rubra*), American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), eastern woodland sedge (*Carex blanda*), white spruce (*Picea glauca*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*), white pine (*Pinus strobus*), sweet birch (*Betula lenta*), tatarian honeysuckle (*Lonicera tatarica*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), hop hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*), common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*),

3.2 Wildlife

3.2.1 Breeding Birds

The following is a list of breeding birds identified on the site in 2023. Appendix 1 is a list of breeding birds. Most of the species were found in multiple habitats although some were observed in specific habitats. The list of observed species includes: wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), blue jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*), American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), black-capped chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*), American robin (*Turdus migratorius*), gray catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), Northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*), Northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), common grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*), and American goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*).

3.2.2 Mammals

The following is a list of breeding birds identified on the site in 2023. Most of the species were found in multiple habitats although some were observed in specific habitats. The list of observed species includes: gray squirrel, Eastern chipmunk, woodchuck, and white-tailed deer.

3.2.3 Herptiles (Reptiles and Amphibians)

No herpetiles were observed during the field visit.

4.0 ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

The proposed development and its appurtenant features will necessarily require clearing of the strip of mixed woods. Anticipated impacts from these activities are outlined below.

4.1 Impacts to Vegetation and Cover Types

1. **Mesophytic Forest Loss.** The proposed activities will require the removal of approximately 1 acres of the 100 acres on the site. The overall forest will remain.
2. **Agricultural Field Loss.** The proposed activities will require the conversion of some of this cover type for the solar array.
3. **Forest Fragmentation.** 1 acre of forested area will be removed for the solar arrays. 99 acres of forest on the site, however, will remain intact. Loss of forest on this site will not alter site biodiversity and no fragmentation of the forest habitat within the site will occur.
4. **Habitat Fragmentation.** Habitat fragmentation differs from forest fragmentation in that forest fragmentation is the practice of opening up closed forest canopy, allowing edge-oriented species to penetrate into areas of the forest that they probably would not reach before. While this adversely impacts forest interior species, it potentially benefits edge species.

Habitat fragmentation is the separation and isolation of habitats and wildlife populations by placing impenetrable barriers between habitats that prevent mixing formerly connected or adjacent wildlife populations creating "habitat islands".

The proposed project leaves the habitats intact except for impacts from the arrays. No habitat fragmentation is expected.

4.2 Impacts to Wildlife

A. All Species. All wildlife species require food, water, and cover. Trees and woody plants provide two of these directly. Many wildlife species, particularly birds, shift their food habits seasonally. Many winter seedeaters switch to insects in summer. Some wildlife species are resident (they are present in the same general area all year). Many others are migratory. The main migratory periods in our area are: spring (April 15 through June 1); fall (August 15 through October 1). Migratory species are present only when passing through, or during part of the year. Some species are here only in the summer and leave for warmer climates during the winter. Others breed north of us and are present only during winter. A few species exhibit altitudinal migrations. That is, they spend part of the year at high elevations (summer, usually) and part of the year at low elevations (winter, usually). Direct impacts to wildlife biodiversity from the proposed arrays will primarily be displacement and some direct loss especially to species that spend a large percentage of their life cycle underground. Most species found on the site are typically found in suburban settings and may have already adapted to proximal human habitation. These species will remain on available lands in the vicinity of the site. The site development will include fencing (surrounding arrays) that will impede wildlife movements through these areas.

B. General Species Migration Patterns. The impact of habitat modification is most relevant for forest species, which includes most of the key species (forest interior birds, large mammals, amphibians and most reptiles). Of these species classes the less mobile amphibians and reptiles are more vulnerable to migratory barriers. Impacts to a site on a local level will not significantly affect large mammal, or migratory bird species movements since these species are highly mobile and not typically confined to small corridors within a site. Regulated wetlands on the site are left virtually intact and are considered the most likely migratory corridors for wildlife species on the site, especially the more sensitive species of amphibians and reptiles. The prime migratory corridors and wildlife destinations for breeding found in the regulated wetlands will remain. The wetland crossing is designed to allow adequate clearance and space for amphibian and reptilian movement through this portion of the regulated wetland complex. Birds and mammals require no extraordinary measures to secure passage through this area.

C. Threatened/Endangered Species. No threatened or endangered species was identified by the NYSDEC or through field observation.

D. Species of Special Concern. There were no marbled, blue spotted, or Jefferson salamanders or evidence of breeding by these species on the site. Also no spotted, eastern box, or wood turtle were observed on the site.

5.0 MITIGATION MEASURES

Mitigation measures for the potential impacts are outlined below.

5.1 Mitigation For Impacts to Vegetation and Cover Types

The Applicant will minimize impacts by establishing undisturbed, naturally vegetated zones demarcated in the field by orange construction fencing and by clearing only necessary areas within the Limit of Disturbance area.

The 1 acre of upland forest area that will be impacted by the arrays will not be replaced since it is an insignificant impact. Native seed may provide wildlife especially bees and other insects with some habitat and food source.

The wetlands on the site provide year-round habitat for most of the species located there. The site will remain a potential wildlife migratory route remains.

5.2 Mitigation for Wildlife Impacts

Wildlife displacement from the project area on the site is not likely since most of the array will be located on agricultural land.

6.0 REFERENCES

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Calhoun, A.J.K. and M. W. Klemens. 2002. Best Development Practices: Conserving pool-breeding amphibians in residential and commercial developments in the Northeastern United States. MCA Technical Paper No. 5, Metropolitan Conservation Alliance, Wildlife Conservation Society, Bronx, New York. 57 pp.

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7.0 PHOTOGRAPHS

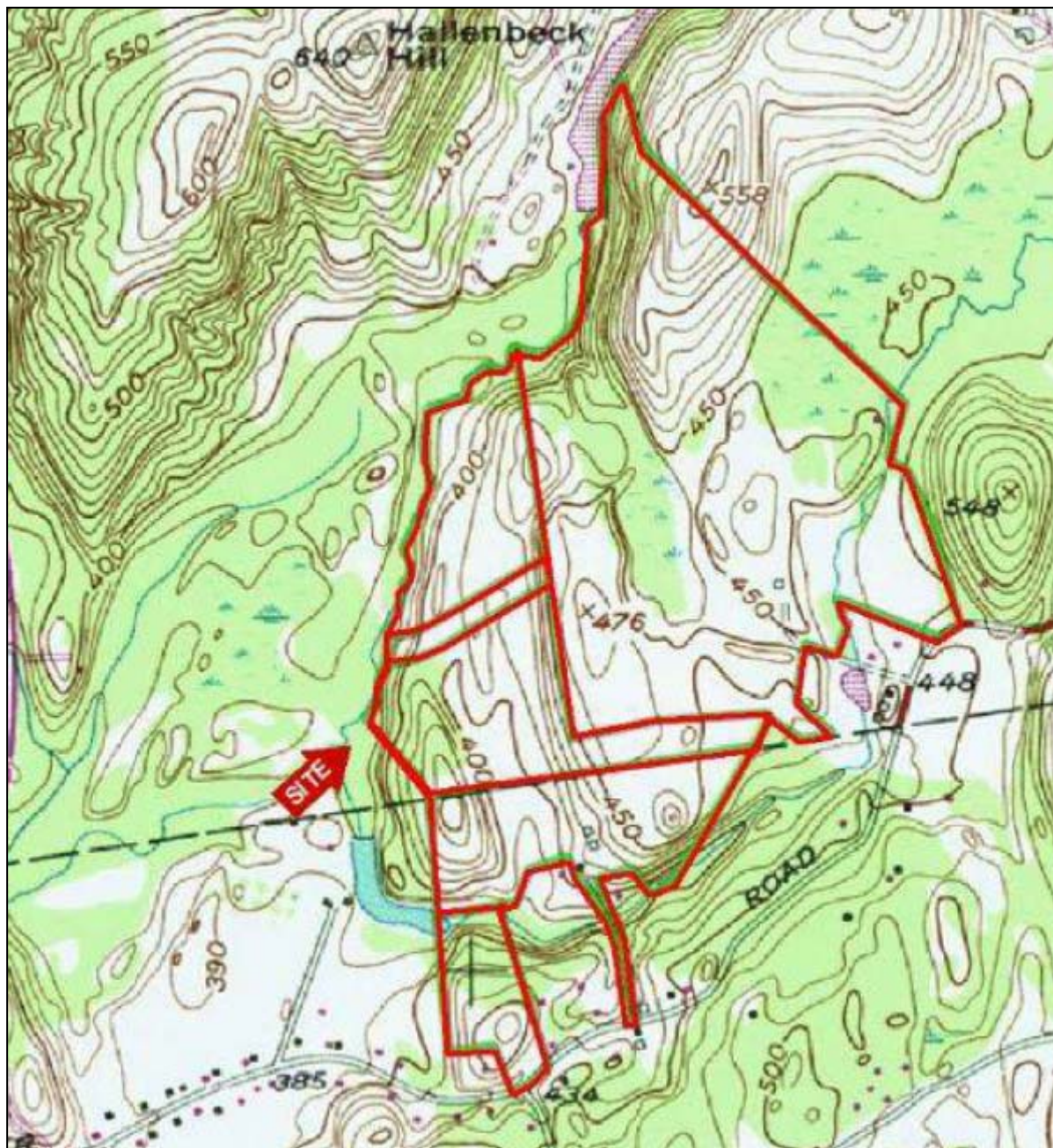
Woods on the site.



Looking into agricultural area.



Figure 1 Location Map



Appendix 1 - New York State Breeding Bird Atlas

Species Recorded in This Block:
Swans, Geese, & Ducks (<i>Anatidae</i>)
Canada Goose (<i>Branta canadensis</i>)
Mute Swan (<i>Cygnus olor</i>)
Wood Duck (<i>Aix sponsa</i>)
Mallard (<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>)
Partridges, Grouse, & Turkeys (<i>Phasianidae</i>)
NONE
New World Quail (<i>Odontophoridae</i>)
NONE
Loons (<i>Gaviidae</i>)
NONE
Grebes (<i>Podicipedidae</i>)
NONE
Pelicans (<i>Pelicanidae</i>)
NONE
Cormorants (<i>Phalacrocoracidae</i>)
NONE
Bitterns, Herons, & Allies (<i>Ardeidae</i>)
Great Blue Heron (<i>Ardea herodias</i>)
Green Heron (<i>Butorides virescens</i>)
Ibises & Spoonbills (<i>Threskiornithidae</i>)
NONE
Vultures (<i>Cathartidae</i>)
Turkey Vulture (<i>Cathartes aura</i>)
Kites, Eagles, Hawks, & Allies (<i>Accipitridae</i>)
Northern Harrier (<i>Circus cyaneus</i>)
Broad-winged Hawk (<i>Buteo platypterus</i>)
Red-tailed Hawk (<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>)
Caracaras & Falcons (<i>Falconidae</i>)
American Kestrel (<i>Falco sparverius</i>)
Rails, Gallinules, & Coots (<i>Rallidae</i>)
NONE
Cranes (<i>Gruidae</i>)
NONE
Plovers & Lapwings (<i>Charadriidae</i>)
Killdeer (<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>)
Oystercatchers (<i>Haematopodidae</i>)
NONE
Sandpipers, Phalaropes, & Allies (<i>Scolopacidae</i>)
Spotted Sandpiper (<i>Actitis macularius</i>)
American Woodcock (<i>Scolopax minor</i>)

Species Recorded in This Block:
Skuas, Gulls, Terns, & Skimmers (<i>Laridae</i>)
NONE
Pigeons & Doves (<i>Columbidae</i>)
Rock Pigeon (<i>Columba livia</i>)
Mourning Dove (<i>Zenaida macroura</i>)
Parrots (<i>Psittacidae</i>)
NONE
Cuckoos, Roadrunners, & Anis (<i>Cuculidae</i>)
NONE
Barn Owls (<i>Tytonidae</i>)
NONE
Typical Owls (<i>Strigidae</i>)
Barred Owl (<i>Strix varia</i>)
Goatsuckers (<i>Caprimulgidae</i>)
NONE
Swifts (<i>Apodidae</i>)
NONE
Hummingbirds (<i>Trochilidae</i>)
NONE
Kingfishers (<i>Alcedinidae</i>)
Belted Kingfisher (<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>)
Woodpeckers & Allies (<i>Picidae</i>)
Red-headed Woodpecker (<i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>)
Red-bellied Woodpecker (<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>)
Downy Woodpecker (<i>Picoides pubescens</i>)
Hairy Woodpecker (<i>Picoides villosus</i>)
Northern Flicker (<i>Colaptes auratus</i>)
Pileated Woodpecker (<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>)
Tyrant Flycatchers (<i>Tyrannidae</i>)
Eastern Wood-Pewee (<i>Contopus virens</i>)
Eastern Phoebe (<i>Sayornis phoebe</i>)
Great Crested Flycatcher (<i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>)
Eastern Kingbird (<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>)
Shrikes (<i>Laniidae</i>)
NONE
Vireos (<i>Vireonidae</i>)
Warbling Vireo (<i>Vireo gilvus</i>)
Jays, Magpies, & Crows (<i>Corvidae</i>)
Blue Jay (<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>)
American Crow (<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>)
Larks (<i>Alaudidae</i>)
NONE
Swallows (<i>Hirundinidae</i>)
Tree Swallow (<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>)
Barn Swallow (<i>Hirundo rustica</i>)
Chickadees & Titmice (<i>Paridae</i>)

Species Recorded in This Block:
Tufted Titmouse (<i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>)
Nuthatches (<i>Sittidae</i>)
White-breasted Nuthatch (<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>)
Creepers (<i>Certhiidae</i>)
NONE
Wrens (<i>Troglodytidae</i>)
Carolina Wren (<i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>)
House Wren (<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>)
Marsh Wren (<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>)
Kinglets (<i>Regulidae</i>)
NONE
Old World Warblers & Gnatcatchers (<i>Sylviidae</i>)
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (<i>Polioptila caerulea</i>)
Thrushes (<i>Turdidae</i>)
Eastern Bluebird (<i>Sialia sialis</i>)
American Robin (<i>Turdus migratorius</i>)
Mockingbirds, Thrashers, & Allies (<i>Mimidae</i>)
Gray Catbird (<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>)
Northern Mockingbird (<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>)
Brown Thrasher (<i>Toxostoma rufum</i>)
Starlings & Allies (<i>Sturnidae</i>)
European Starling (<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>)
Waxwings (<i>Bombycillidae</i>)
Cedar Waxwing (<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>)
Wood Warblers (<i>Parulidae</i>)
Yellow Warbler (<i>Dendroica petechia</i>)
Common Yellowthroat (<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>)
Tanagers (<i>Thraupidae</i>)
NONE
Towhees, Buntings, Sparrows, & Allies (<i>Emberizidae</i>)
Chipping Sparrow (<i>Spizella passerina</i>)
Savannah Sparrow (<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>)
Song Sparrow (<i>Melospiza melodia</i>)
Grosbeaks & Buntings (<i>Cardinalidae</i>)
Northern Cardinal (<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>)
Rose-breasted Grosbeak (<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>)
Blackbirds (<i>Icteridae</i>)
Bobolink (<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>)
Red-winged Blackbird (<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>)
Eastern Meadowlark (<i>Sturnella magna</i>)
Common Grackle (<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>)
Brown-headed Cowbird (<i>Molothrus ater</i>)
Orchard Oriole (<i>Icterus spurius</i>)
Baltimore Oriole (<i>Icterus galbula</i>)
Finches (<i>Fringillidae</i>)
House Finch (<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>)

Species Recorded in This Block:
American Goldfinch (<i>Carduelis tristis</i>)
Old World Sparrows (<i>Passeridae</i>)
House Sparrow (<i>Passer domesticus</i>)