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Vulture Management at Avon Park Air Force Range, Florida

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Coincident with rising vulture populations have been reports of increased aircraft safety issues. There have been over 700 vulture strikes with US Air Force aircraft at costs in excess of \$150 million. The Avon Park Air Force Range (APAFR) harbors a thriving vulture population which often creates dangerous situations for pilots on low-level training missions. In 2005-2006, we conducted research to 1) disperse vultures from roosts on and near the APAFR; 2) assess vulture use of the ranges before and after roost dispersal; and 3) evaluate vulture use of the surrounding area. Baseline counts of vultures leaving a large nearby roost ranged from 144 to 624 (mean = 404). After roost dispersal using vulture effigies, counts were 2-91 (mean = 41). Prior to roost dispersal, vultures counted over the training ranges varied between 0 and 50, whereas post-treatment counts ranged from 1 to 20. Mean counts did not change appreciably following roost dispersal. We tagged and released 373 birds (332 black vultures and 41 turkey vultures), of which 47 (12.6%) have been resighted. We conclude that the county landfill adjacent to the southern boundary of APAFR is a key resource for area vultures. Unfortunately, the lack of data confirming interactions among vultures and aircraft on the APAFR, permits no risk profile. Records of when, where, and how missions are altered or impacted by vultures would allow for a risk profile to be developed. This in turn could be used to schedule missions during periods of lower hazard conditions and to allocate resources optimally to counter

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potential bird strike threats. Finally, removing or limiting certain land use activities (calving livestock, mowing, burning, timber harvesting) would greatly reduce the attractiveness of the APAFR for vultures and in turn, increase safety.