

DRAFT letter to Virginia State officials concerning the tern colony that nests on the south island of HRBT

Dear recipient (key decision makers: Governor, Secretary of Transportation, Secretary of Natural Resources, Commissioner of VDOT, and Director of DGIF),

The Hampton Roads Bird Club strongly advocates protecting and relocating the 25,000 migratory seabirds that nest on the South Island of the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel. The South Island has been, for over thirty years, a critical habitat for eight avian species including the state-threatened Gull-Billed Tern. The island is the largest seabird colony in Virginia and the only location in the Commonwealth where Sandwich Terns and Royal Terns nest. As you are aware, the much-needed Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel expansion project will displace the terns when they return to Virginia in March.

A feasible plan to build an island on nearby Hampton Flats has been proposed by the Virginia Tech Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation. Islands have been built by Virginia's neighboring states and successfully occupied by seabird colonies. Furthermore, island building would be a beneficial use of soils, as the Hampton Roads Harbor is being dredged this winter.

Considering the historic decline of colonial nesting seabirds in Virginia, and the likelihood that the proposed island would become a successful alternate nesting site, this project is urgent and essential. We who live in Hampton Roads are particularly concerned about the nesting colony as Hampton Roads is their home too. It is inconceivable that these beautiful birds may be lost in Virginia due to inaction. Moving the colony to a mammalian predator-free island is a win-win solution for both the birds and for motorists that traverse the HRBT during the summer. We are asking you to advocate protecting this precious part of Virginia's natural heritage.

Thank you for your support,

Shawn T. Dash, PhD
President, Hampton Roads Bird Club