Cooper's Hawk Information

In July, 2014 Todd Williams, a City of Alameda Public Works Supervisor had a conversation with Allen M. Fish, Director of the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory. Below are the questions and answers from that conversation:

Williams: Recently there has been discussion between staff and citizens on whether to remove or not remove large liquidambars trees on the 1700 block of Chapin Street. Our residents who keep a watchful eye on the active nests have informed me that although the 1700 block of Chapin Street was once an active nest area for Cooper's Hawk, in the recent past there has not been any sightings. What happens when the hawks return for the season and for whatever reason, they find out a tree is no longer there?

Fish: Over ten years of running the Berkeley Cooper's Hawk study we learned that, although territories (roughly 0.25 square miles in Berkeley) were somewhat stable, nest trees changed quite a bit. Thus, I would expect a hawk or hawk pair to return to the territory around late-January, early-February, and evaluate the trees-nest microhabitat anew.

Williams: What kind of effect does this have on the hawks, if any?

Fish: As long as there are other street trees available in the general area (all of Alameda might be fair game) I would not expect any big effect on the hawks. Think of the real life, ancient California situation: trees fall over with age; trees get burned by fire; flooded by rain run-off. If ancient Cooper's Hawks had been so upset by such events, we would not have them in our midst today. They evolved to be resilient to some habitat change.

Williams: Assuming the tree is still there, do the hawks stay at the same nest every year or is it possible that they relocate from time to time? If so, how often or at what frequency does this occur?

Fish: In Berkeley over ten years, we measured annual nest site turnover as about 30%, meaning roughly 1 out 3 times a pair would relocate a nest to a different site or tree for no obvious reason. The ecological view of such "home-switching" is that the nests themselves become known to local predators (for Cooper's Hawks, most likely raccoons, great horned owls, and ravens); although some ecologists think that

nests also suffer from an overabundance of ecto-parasites at some point, and that the hawk needs to "clean house" or really, leave it behind. Thirdly, raptors may switch territories in a new breeding season as they may have so depleted the local prey supply especially while feeding young in the previous summer. There is actually a fourth reason hawks may switch nests: nest-building by the male and female is known to visually stimulate the gonads of the other.