

GRASSLAND TODAY

The Grassland Wetlands Newsletter

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www.grasslandwetlands.com

September/October 2006

Hunting Season to Run Oct. 21-Jan. 28

Strong Nesting Effort Boosts Populations for Most Species of Waterfowl

An increase in the quality of waterfowl breeding habitat in the United States and Canada, above-average precipitation and higher pond numbers have combined to boost duck populations to more than 36 million—a 14 percent increase over last year and 9 percent above the 50-year long-term average since 1955.

The positive figures were taken from the 2006 Waterfowl Breeding Ground Population and Habitat Survey conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and served as the basis for the upcoming waterfowl-hunting season. For the so-called “balance of the state zone,” including the Grasslands, duck and goose hunting seasons will start Oct. 21 and run straight through Jan. 28, 2007.

A special “after season,” federally-recognized Youth Waterfowl Hunt will take place Feb. 3-4, 2007, for youth 15 years and under who possess a Junior Hunting License.

Please refer to a compendium of waterfowl hunting regulations on page 4.

“The local hatch appeared to be good,” said Fish and Game biologist Greg Gerstenberg. “Pintail arrived on schedule between Aug. 9-14, and there seems to be quite a number of ducks already on the wintering grounds.”

Gerstenberg said he didn’t know specific bird counts because the DFG didn’t conduct a mid-September flight this year. He will be conducting a wing survey on opening weekend, Oct. 21-22, asking clubs and public areas to voluntarily provide a wing from each

pintail, mallard, green-winged teal and shoveler harvested.

There is good news for this coming

duck season, especially for Grassland hunters.

(Continued, page 6)



Populations Rising — Two important species of duck, pintail and green-winged teal (pictured below) have increased their numbers by 18 and 20 percent respectively for this year’s fall flight. Photos by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Newly Designed Website Online

Grassland Water District Unveils Improved Website

The Grassland Water District unveiled its newly designed and improved website to reach out to wetlands owners, hunter conservationists, environmentalists, governmental agencies and non-profit organizations. The website address is: www.grasslandwetlands.com.

“If information about the Grasslands is what you seek, you can click on this marvelous, one-stop resource that covers our 51,000-acre district and the greater 180,000-acre Grassland Ecological Area, as a whole,” said GWD director Doug Federighi. “You’ll find links to agencies that work to protect the Grasslands, the largest, contiguous historic marsh that still remains in the Central Valley, and current facts about projects and studies, events and the one-of-a-kind Grassland Environmental Education Center that teaches children about the important roles that hunters and farmers play in preserving Grasslands.”

The website includes a home page that ties into so many subjects, including current and back issues of *Grass-*

land Today, the district’s newsletter, news bulletins, brochures and a fast-paced message board, where people interested in the Grasslands can toss ideas back and forth.

“We’re in the communication age,” Federighi said. “Our goal is to promote this website and create a network of stakeholders that are so important to the sustainability and longevity of the Grasslands, and the important work the water district does on behalf of our natural resources and the local economy.”

Federighi cited a recent study that showed the Grasslands boosting the Merced County economy by upwards of \$61 million annually. “People are very surprised to learn that Grasslands is more than critical habitat for wildlife and natural resources,” he said. “Our county and local communities are large beneficiaries, too.”

Questions about, or suggestions to improve, the website may be directed to Veronica Woodruff at the GWD, (209) 826-5188.



Grassland Today

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The Grassland Water District and the Grassland Resource Conservation District are dedicated to providing water and habitat protection for waterfowl, shorebirds, plants and other wildlife and in promoting associated educational and recreational opportunities.

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Water District Undertakes Three-Year Program to Improve Quality of River

The Grassland Water District is taking a pro-active approach on behalf of its private wetlands owners and managers to investigate the possibility of improving the quality of the San Joaquin River through an intensive three-year water-monitoring study.

Funding for the \$900,000 study comes from the State Water Resources Control Board, with money derived from Proposition 50. The effort will include 24 monitoring stations located on private- and state-owned lands, in conjunction with the California Department of Fish and Game.

General manager Don Marciochi said the monitoring program will analyze water that is applied to seasonal wetlands in the Grassland Ecological Area and spring water that is discharged to the river when wetlands are drained. The study will focus on water quality, particularly salt content.

"We're doing this work as our part in meeting the requirements to reduce and control salt load in the San Joaquin River," Marciochi said. "There has been a feeling among some that wetlands contribute a significant part of the salt in the river. One of the ways suggested by these stakeholders—something we need to be looking at—is holding water longer, before we drain wetlands."

Rather than discharge in March, water in the wetlands in the monitoring program will be held until the river has higher flows to more easily assimilate the discharge. This will likely occur between mid-April and May to coincide with increased river flows for fish.

"It's kind of late for us, but we'll see the effects of draining later than we'd like," Marciochi said. "We may also stagger some water releases to see what happens. We already know water quality can vary from site to site."

He said Grassland wetlands historically drain in March as part of "best management practices" to propagate moist soil plants, natural feed for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds.

There is also a companion grant, received by Fish and Game, that will go hand-in-hand with the water monitoring study. The companion effort will look at the health of the wetlands as a result of holding water for a longer period. Fish

and Game scientists will do vegetation studies, examine bird use and record what happens to wetlands when the hydrology is changed.

"We need to know how the delayed draining may change the habitat," Marciochi explained. "We think we've been managing for moist soil plants in an optimal fashion. However, we want to know if we change things, what the outcomes will be."

The current water monitoring study isn't the first effort to understand the effects of draining wetlands on the San Joaquin River. Previously the GWD sponsored the Real Time Water Monitoring Study on the Salinas Gun Club, to gather information about salt loads and other elements contained in water used on private clubs.

For information about the ongoing three-year study, contact Marciochi at the GWD office at (209) 826-5188.

Upcoming Dinners Support Wetlands and Waterfowl

Two fund-raising dinners that support wetlands and waterfowl are planned for Los Banos in the near future.

The 20th annual California Waterfowl Association dinner is Fri., Nov. 3 at the Fairgrounds. Hosted bar at 6 p.m., prime rib dinner at 7 p.m. Donation: \$30 per person includes hat, membership and entry into door raffle prize.

The 36th Ducks Unlimited dinner is Fri., Dec. 1 at the Fairgrounds. Hosted bar at 5:30 p.m., prime rib dinner catered by Espanas at 7 p.m. Donation: \$65 per person includes dinner, hosted bar, hat and membership; \$45 youth; \$95 couple.

Each event offers auctions, raffles and games, with activities and premiums for youth.

Tickets to these dinners are available through the Grassland Water District office by calling (209) 826-5188. For specific details about the CWA dinner contact Tom Homen at (209) 587-0886; for the DU dinner contact Sean Allen at (209) 826-6893.

Be sure to ask about "early bird" deals, opportunities to donate and purchase special tables.

GWD Board Opposes Proposition 90

At its last meeting, the Grassland Water District Board of Directors went on record expressing GWD's opposition to the statewide ballot initiative "Proposition 90." Proposition 90's backers claim it was written in response to the U.S. Supreme Court decision last year upholding the use of eminent domain in a Connecticut case (*Kelo v. City of New London*). GWD urges landowners within the Grasslands to carefully consider their votes on this important initiative.

Eminent domain is the power of the government to acquire private property for a public use, subject to just compensation to the property owner. The *Kelo* case involved acquisition by a city of privately owned real property so that the property could be used as part of a comprehensive redevelopment plan. The Supreme Court held that the community-wide economic benefits that would result from the redevelopment plan qualified as a permissible "public use" for purposes of the eminent domain power.

In addition to placing further restrictions on what constitutes a public use, Proposition 90 would dramatically increase the range of government actions that may require compensation, and would make the determination of just

Delta-Mendota Canal To Be Dewatered

The San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority will dewater the Delta-Mendota Canal, the primary source of water for the Grasslands, from the end of November through December to carry out much-needed maintenance on the facility. During this four-week period clubs will be unable to receive water. "It is critical that clubs conserve the early flood waters they receive and reduce seepage through their weir boards," said GWD assistant general manager Scott Lower. "It is essential that clubs retain all the water they have and make sure their water control structures are working properly so no water is lost. We will be unable to supply water while maintenance to the Delta-Mendota Canal is underway." He suggests doubling board weirs or, in the case of new concrete weirs, adding manure between the slots (dirt works well, too). Information: (209) 826-5188.

compensation in eminent domain proceedings much more complex. Proposition 90 would authorize a claim for compensation against the taxpayers for any substantial cost incurred by a business or property owner in complying with new government action, unless that action is to protect public health and safety. As a result of these changes to the State Constitution, Proposition 90 could make more difficult or even eliminate the ability to pass or enforce laws that protect habitat, ensure adequate water supplies and preserve other natural resources.

If Proposition 90 were to pass:

- **Wetlands may be threatened.** Compensation requirements could be triggered whenever development on or around wetlands was restricted by local or state agencies. If the agency is unwilling or unable to pay these costs, they would be forced to allow development near sensitive wetlands. Efforts to persuade local governments to adopt buffer zones around key wetlands could also be stopped.

- **Acquiring land for refuges and open space could become cost-prohibitive.** New levels of inflated payouts to property owners may be required whenever land or conservation easements are acquired. This could make conservation efforts so prohibitively expensive that many will simply not be done.

- Funds for refuge protections included in Proposition 84, also on this November's ballot, could be impacted by Proposition 90 because projects could end up costing much more.

- **Water supply and water quality could be at risk:** If voters or state or local governments pass laws to maintain or improve water supply or quality for species protection, such as waterfowl, salmon, delta fish, and plants, Proposition 90 could require the state to make huge payments, possibly making such protections infeasible to implement.

- **Sprawl would be harder to stop.** If voters or a local government takes steps to limit the size of a development project, and the developer claims the property could accommodate more development, taxpayers may have to pay for the value of the houses the developer was not allowed to build.

GWD urges all landowners within GWD to learn as much as possible about Proposition 90.

Grassland Notes

- **Wildlife Art Show** — "The Art of the Decoy" exhibition continues through Nov. 12 at the McHenry Museum in Modesto. Admission is free. The museum, located at 14th and I Sts., is open noon to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday. Features: Antique and contemporary decoys; carvings of waterfowl, shorebirds, seabirds and game birds; fine wildlife art; waterfowling memorabilia and a collection of original California Duck Stamp paintings. Special events: Museum open from 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Oct. 21-22 with waterfowl carvers and artists on hand, including Sherrie Russell Meline, winner of the 2006-2007 federal Duck Stamp contest. Information: Jerry Urban, (209) 343-5223; Ed Lotko, (209) 522-0128; www.mchenrymuseum.org.

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- **Supervisors Approval** — For the first time in 20 years the Merced County Board of Supervisors will allow the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to expand its Grasslands Wildlife Management Easement Boundary. The action, taken Sept. 26, will allow the USFWS to expand its preserve by 47,000 acres. The plan is supported by the Merced County Farm Bureau, which hopes to preserve the county's fertile farmland. The USFWS will place easements by paying property owners about 50 percent of the value of their land in exchange for agreements in perpetuity not to develop the land. Kim Forrest, project leader of the San Luis Wildlife Refuge Complex in Los Banos said by expanding easement boundaries the preserve would create an east-west corridor for migratory birds and San Joaquin kit fox to travel. For information call (209) 826-3508.

* * *

- **Waterfowl Harvest Statistics** — For the past 15 years the Grassland Water District has collected harvest data on a voluntary basis from private duck clubs from within the district. Last year 44 clubs participated in the program, said GWD biologist Richard Wright. From these statistics the GWD publishes a district-wide summary of harvest information, and breaks it down by two main areas—north and south. Results of the summary provide excellent data on hunting trends that help district personnel better manage the Grasslands as a whole. Information: (209) 826-5188.

Grassland Wetlands of Merced County 2006-2007 Waterfowl Hunting Regulations

Highlights:

- 100 day straight season for ducks and geese
- Mallard limit increased to 7 birds, of which 2 may be hens
- Pintail and canvasback may be hunted the entire season
- Electronic or mechanically operated spinning wing decoys allowed starting December 1
(Wind-powered spinning blade devices and kites are not prohibited.)
- Goose limit expanded to 4 of any species
- Two special “after season” Youth Hunts

Regulations for Balance of State Zone, including Grasslands:

Season Dates: Oct. 21 through Jan. 28, 2007

Shooting Hours: One-half hour before sunrise to sunset

- **Ducks** – Daily Bag: 7 birds.
Exceptions: The daily bag may include not more than 2 hen mallard, 2 redhead, 3 scaup, 1 pintail, 1 canvasback.
Possession Limit: Double the daily bag
- **Geese** – Daily Bag: 4 geese of any species
Exception: Sacramento Valley (west) Special Management Area where no more than 2 white-fronted geese may be taken
Possession Limit: Double the daily bag

“After Season” Youth Hunts: Feb. 3-4, 2007

Waterfowl Hunting Resources:

California Department of Fish and Game,
Los Banos Wildlife Area (209) 826-0463

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service,
San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex, (209) 826-3508

Grassland Water District, (209) 826-5188; www.grasslandwetlands.com

CalTip Poaching Hotline: (888) 334-2258
www.dfg.ca.gov/enforcement/caltip.html

2006-2007 Waterfowl Hunting Season Starting and Stopping Times Los Banos, California

Data provided by the U.S. Naval Observatory

Date	One-Half Hour Before Sunrise	Sunset
Sat., Oct. 21	6:47 a.m.	6:19 p.m.
Sun., Oct. 22	6:48 a.m.	6:17 p.m.
Wed., Oct. 25	6:51 a.m.	6:14 p.m.
Sat., Oct. 28	6:54 a.m.	6:10 p.m.
*Sun., Oct. 29	5:55 a.m.	5:09 p.m.
Wed., Nov. 1	5:58 a.m.	5:06 p.m.
Sat., Nov. 4	6:01 a.m.	5:03 p.m.
Sun., Nov. 5	6:02 a.m.	5:02 p.m.
Wed., Nov. 8	6:05 a.m.	4:59 p.m.
Sat., Nov. 11	6:08 a.m.	4:57 p.m.
Sun., Nov. 12	6:09 a.m.	4:56 p.m.
Wed., Nov. 15	6:12 a.m.	4:54 p.m.
Sat., Nov. 18	6:15 a.m.	4:52 p.m.
Sun., Nov. 19	6:16 a.m.	4:51 p.m.
Wed., Nov. 22	6:19 a.m.	4:50 p.m.
Sat., Nov. 25	6:22 a.m.	4:48 p.m.
Sun., Nov. 26	6:23 a.m.	4:48 p.m.
Wed., Nov. 29	6:26 a.m.	4:47 p.m.
Sat., Dec. 2	6:29 a.m.	4:46 p.m.
Sun., Dec. 3	6:30 a.m.	4:46 p.m.
Wed., Dec. 6	6:33 a.m.	4:46 p.m.
Sat., Dec. 9	6:35 a.m.	4:46 p.m.
Sun., Dec. 10	6:36 a.m.	4:47 p.m.
Wed., Dec. 13	6:38 a.m.	4:47 p.m.
Sat., Dec. 16	6:40 a.m.	4:48 p.m.
Sun., Dec. 17	6:41 a.m.	4:48 p.m.
Wed., Dec. 20	6:43 a.m.	4:50 p.m.
Sat., Dec. 23	6:44 a.m.	4:51 p.m.
Sun., Dec. 24	6:45 a.m.	4:52 p.m.
Wed., Dec. 27	6:46 a.m.	4:54 p.m.
Sat., Dec. 30	6:46 a.m.	4:56 p.m.
Sun., Dec. 31	6:47 a.m.	4:56 p.m.
Wed., Jan. 3	6:47 a.m.	4:59 p.m.
Sat., Jan. 6	6:47 a.m.	5:01 p.m.
Sun., Jan. 7	6:47 a.m.	5:02 p.m.
Wed., Jan. 10	6:47 a.m.	5:05 p.m.
Sat., Jan. 13	6:46 a.m.	5:08 p.m.
Sun., Jan. 14	6:46 a.m.	5:09 p.m.
Wed., Jan. 17	6:45 a.m.	5:12 p.m.
Sat., Jan. 20	6:44 a.m.	5:15 p.m.
Sun., Jan. 21	6:43 a.m.	5:16 p.m.
Wed., Jan. 24	6:42 a.m.	5:20 p.m.
Sat., Jan. 27	6:40 a.m.	5:23 p.m.
**Sun., Jan. 28	6:39 a.m.	5:24 p.m.
***Sat., Feb. 3	6:34 a.m.	5:30 p.m.
Sun., Feb. 4	6:34 a.m.	5:31 p.m.

* Pacific Standard Time Begins

** Regular Waterfowl Hunting Season Ends

*** Special two-day "after season" Youth Waterfowl Hunting Begins

Return Service Requested

September/October 2006



Populations Increase for Most Species...(from page 1)

- The Grasslands' number one duck in the bag, green-winged teal, is expected to fly south in 20 percent greater numbers than last year. Its estimated population of 2.6 million is a whopping 39 percent greater than the 50-year, long-term average.
 - Sacramento Valley is experiencing a delayed rice harvest so many of its normally flooded fields are bone dry. Many migrating ducks are expected to over-fly the region to the benefit of Grasslands, which offered critical early water.
 - Waterfowl hunting on refuges and wildlife areas north of Sacramento will have a one-week delay, and not open until Oct. 28.
 - Pintail numbers are anticipated to increase by 32 percent over last year. The abundance of pintail at 3.4 million is still 18 percent below the long-term, but showing significant improvement. As a result, pintail may be hunted throughout the entire season, although the daily limit is still one bird. Last year's highly restricted 60-day pintail season is over.
 - Northern shoveler, another important species in the Grasslands, have increased to 3.7 million, 69 percent above their long-term average.
 - Local nesters such as mallard and gadwall have increased by 10 and 30 percent, respectively.
- “Most species increased above the estimates of last year and numbers were above the long-term baseline,” said H. Dale Hall, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “We’re especially excited about the fact that, while pintail

populations are below their historic average numbers, the survey shows a 32 percent increase. There’s a lot of good news in the survey this year for the total duck population and waterfowl breeding habitat.”

The complete 2006 Trends in Waterfowl Breeding Populations report can be downloaded from the USFWS website at: www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/

For local perspectives about waterfowl populations or the waterfowl hunting season, contact Dennis Woolington at USFWS at (209) 826-3508 or Bill Cook at the DFG at (209) 826-0463.

Report Bird Band Recoveries Online

The U.S. Geological Survey announces a new way to report a bird band—over the internet—and receive immediate information about the bird. Simply go to the website: www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/bblretrv/webrec.cmf.

By using the internet the USGS can provide basic banding information on the bird you are reporting, including the state or province where the bird was banded, the date it was banded and the species.

Although 90 percent of band numbers will return data, in some cases no information will be available, USGS officials said. There are three reasons why data may not be available: The bird may be greater than 10 years old, the band may not yet have been reported by the bander or there is an error in reading or entering the band number.

Of course, banded birds may also be reported between 9 a.m.-4 p.m. ECT, toll-free line at (800) 327-BAND.