

GRASSLAND TODAY

The Grassland Wetlands Newsletter

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www.grasslandwetlands.org

March/April 2007



Local Nesters — Cinnamon teal spring from summer brood water in the Grasslands. Clubs can anticipate only 33 percent of normal water allocations this spring and summer because of the exceptionally dry year.

Spring-Summer Water Reduction

The 2007 water year has been listed as a dry year by the Bureau of Reclamation.

“The Grassland Water District’s Level-4 water that is used for spring and summer irrigation is less than half of our normal annual allocation,” said water master Scott Lower. “Although this amount may not allow for clubs to double irrigate or fully manage brood ponds, it should allow clubs to choose what type of management they would like to perform through the summer.”

General Manager Dave Widell’s advice to landowners is that while they may not want to be managing for water intensive food crops this year, they “shouldn’t freak.”

“Water shortages, whether caused from weather or plumbing, are a reality of life and clubs should plan accord-

ingly,” Widell said. “We have been fortunate to have experienced a number of wet years, which have supplemented district water supplies and given landowners more flexibility. This year, we are facing a different situation.”

It will be important that all clubs requesting water stay in close contact with their water tender. Water tenders can keep the clubs informed about allocations, total amount of water used, and recommendations for water conservation.

Clubs should have no problems being full for the fall and winter season. The CVPIA guarantees full supplies (referred to as Level 2) in all but critically dry years. Clubs can expect that the District will closely monitor water flowing through clubs in an attempt to insure that sound conservation is practiced.

Water and Encroachment are Focus of Landowner Meeting

Encroachment, development and other land use threats to the Grassland Ecological Area will top the agenda at the annual Grassland landowner meeting from 8:30 a.m. to noon, May 19 at the Los Banos Sportsmen’s Club on Mercey Springs Road. Admission is free.

Meeting coordinator Veronica Woodruff said there will be a presentation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as a comprehensive review of the 2006-2007 waterfowl harvest on private clubs and public hunting areas.

“Agency staff will be available for one-on-one discussions with landowners,” Woodruff said. “There are many cost-share and other incentive programs of which private landowners should be aware.

“The issues of owning, maintaining and protecting wetlands have never been more complex,” she said. “That’s why clubs should have representatives at this meeting.”

A raffle and silent auction benefitting GEECE will also be held.

(Continued, page 5)

New Website Address/ Office Hours for Grassland Water District

To more effectively serve the public and landowners, the Grassland Water District has established a new website address: www.grasslandwetlands.org.

Effective April 30, 2007, GWD office hours will be 7:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.

Effective March 19 all individual staff e-mail addresses now conclude with: @grasslandwetlands.org. Please refer to a revised e-mail and mobile telephone listing of the GWD staff found on page 6.

Grassland Today

The bi-monthly newsletter of the Grassland Water District and the Grassland Resource Conservation District, 22759 S. Mercey Springs Rd., Los Banos 93635.

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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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Chinese Delegation Tours Grasslands

Distinguished Visitors — *Dr. Xie Chongbao*, Ministry of Water Resources, People's Republic of China (left), and his assistant, **Gao Hong**, a senior engineer, pose with **Scott Lower**, water master for the Grassland Water District.

"They seemed most impressed with the GWD's operation and could not get over the idea that so much wetlands habitat is being provided by private ownership," Lower said.

At one point during their two-day tour, Dr. Chongbao took a picture of a gate with eight locks on it. Lower said, "When I asked him why he was so interested in the locks, he replied, 'In China, one lock. Government.'"

New Fish and Game Hunting Digest Publication

Whether it's big game, upland birds or waterfowl, California hunters can read all about it in Fish and Game's new publication, *California Hunting Digest*. Best yet, the digest is available free online or in printed form.

Hunting Digest combines a number of publications into one grand publication including *Tracks*, *Wing Beat News-Region 2* (northern Sierra), *Wing-Beat News-Region 4* (central Sierra and Grassland wetlands) and *Big Game Hunting*. The new digest will be published quarterly.

"The *Hunting Digest* will carry on the proud tradition of serving our hunt-

ing community by providing regular summaries, hunt seasons, public drawings for tags and reservations, maps, species forecasts and much more," said editor Lorna Bernard. "In short, it provides 'one stop shopping' for hunters who are used to getting quality service and comprehensive information from Fish and Game."

The April 2007 issue of *Hunting Digest* is hot off the press. To request a copy or obtain a free subscription send your mailing address to publications@dfg.ca.gov. For more information contact Bernard at lbernard@dfg.ca.gov or call (916) 653-0991.

Recruitment/Retention Stabilizes Among Young Hunters and Anglers

Recruitment rates of boys and girls who hunt and fish have stabilized after declining through the 1990s, according to data from the 2006 National Surveys of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Related Recreation and Information.

"These rates are critical to the future of fish and wildlife conservation," said Dale Hall, director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "The North American model of conservation, a system that keeps wildlife as a public and sustainable resource, scientifically managed by professionals and agencies such as the USFWS and state counterparts, is funded in large part by hunters and anglers.

"From 1990 to 2000 there was a

steady decline in the percent of kids living at home who had never participated in fishing and hunting," Hall said. "During the last five years this decline has stabilized. Now 42 percent of our nation's youth have gone fishing and 8 percent have gone hunting at least once."

"We're holding our own with junior hunters," said Roger Wilbur at Los Banos Wildlife Area. "About 10 percent of our capacity are junior hunters. We have the entire Mud Slough Unit and three junior blinds at Los Banos WA proper that are strictly for juniors and chaperones. We have something for them to come to, and they are responding."

The complete national survey from 1990 to 2005 is available at: http://library.fws.gov/nat_survey2001_recruitment.pdf.

For information about ongoing efforts to serve youth hunters in the Grasslands, contact Wilbur at (209) 826-0463.

Summer Camps for Youth, Ages 10 to 16

California Waterfowl Association is offering a series of hunting camps for boys and girls, 10 to 16 years, in the San Joaquin Valley.

Costs of the camps vary and scholarships for needy youth are available. To learn specifics about the hunting camps call CWA at (916) 648-1406 or go online at www.calwaterfowl.org.

Here's a brief description of each camp:

June 19-23

Title: Basic Hunters Camp

Location: Turk Station, Coalinga

Ages: 10-13 years

Activities: Hunter education, hands-on shooting activities, waterfowl identification, hunting techniques for waterfowl, upland game birds and big game.

June 26-30

Title: Advanced Hunters Camp

Location: Turk Station, Coalinga

Ages: 14-16 years

Activities: Waterfowl, big game, upland game bird and wild pig hunting skills; game callings, trap and five-stand target shooting, archery, GPS/orienteering challenge, survival skills.

July 20-22

Title: Basic Waterfowl Hunters Camp

Location: Mandeville Island, Stockton

Ages: 10-15 years

Activities: Hunter's certification, hands-on shooting activities, waterfowl identification and hunting gear, duck calling instruction, decoys and placement, ducks banding.

July 27-29

Title: Advanced Waterfowl Hunters Camp

Location: Mandeville Island, Stockton

Ages: 11-15 years

Activities: Waterfowl, upland game bird and big game hunting skills; game calling, shotgun, rifle and archery ranges; GPS/orienteering challenge, survival skills.

New Book Chronicles Waterfowl Migrations

A new and comprehensive book titled, *Flyways, A Celebration of Waterfowl and Wetlands*, has been published by Ducks Unlimited. It features the writing and photography of Gary Kramer, a former refuge manager for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and includes color photos of every species of waterfowl that graces the North American continent.

The "coffee table" volume is available in soft cover for \$26.90 and hardcover for \$34.90, directly from the author, who signs each book. Send order to: Gary Kramer, P.O. Box 903, Willows, CA 95988. Information: (530) 934-3873; www.garykramer.net.

Invitation to Help With General Plan

Merced County Supervisors have invited the Grassland Resource conservation district to assist with preparation of the General Plan Update by participating on an Open Space/Habitat Focus Group and the Grassland Water District to be part of a Water Resources Focus Group.

The Merced County General Plan Update project began in May 2006 and will be completed in early 2009. The plan will cover a broad range of issues involving land use, growth, environment and the quality of life within the county over the next 20 years.

Fish and Game Commission Recognizes Hall of Fame

The California Fish and Game Commission has officially recognized the newly formed California Waterfowlers Hall of Fame and its first class of inductees.

The Waterfowlers Hall of Fame was established to honor those individuals who have made significant contributions toward enhancing waterfowl resources in the state.

Inductees include:

- **Bert McKee**, 1904-1991, who served as president of Ducks Unlimited and dedicated 54 years to waterfowl conservation.
- **Bill Ready**, 1938-2001, who served as president of California Waterfowl Association and spent 36 years working for the resource.
- **Bob Eberhardt**, 1927-1994, who served as president of Ducks Unlimited.
- **Dennis Raveling**, 1939-1991, professor of wildlife at University of California, Davis, who inspired a commitment to waterfowl among his students.
- **Harvey Sorensen**, 1899-1979, the co-founder and past president of Ducks Unlimited.
- **Warren Rienecker**, 1927-1991, who served as a waterfowl biologist for more than 30 years with the state Department of Fish and Game.

For information about the Waterfowlers Hall of Fame contact John Carlson at the Fish and Game Commission at (916) 653-4899.



Arid Environment — Ducks Unlimited and its partners intend to enhance more than 3,000 acres, remnants of the once massive Sonoran Desert wetland complex.

Waterfowl to benefit from habitat restoration

DU Receives Grant to Conserve Sonoran Wetlands

Ducks Unlimited has been awarded a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant to conserve wetland habitat on the Lower Colorado River and Salton Sea. Project partners will acquire, restore, or enhance a total of 4,642 acres of important wetlands and associated upland habitats at the two locations.

“NAWCA grants are crucial to DU’s ability to restore and protect wetlands. Partner contributions allow DU to leverage their funds to conserve even more habitat,” said DU’s Western Regional Office Director of Conservation Programs, Mark Biddlecomb. “This grant highlights the importance of state and local partnerships. Without those funds, these projects would simply not be possible.”

DU partnered with the California Wildlife Conservation Board, California Department of Fish and Game, Cazador Duck Club, Friends of Cibola National Wildlife Refuge, P & T Enterprises, Ralph Richmond Duck Club and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The project will ultimately attract more waterfowl to the southern part of the state. These birds, in turn, will filter through the Grassland Wetlands as part of their migratory north-south movements.

Approximately \$2.1 million in matching funds from project partners will be combined with \$1 million in NAWCA grant funds. It will restore, protect and enhance wetlands critical to waterfowl within the remnants of the once-massive Sonoran Desert wetland complex. Biddlecomb said the project will take two years to complete.

In the Salton Sea project area, partners will enhance 3,107 acres of wetlands and associated uplands at California’s Imperial Wildlife Area. Partners also will enhance 80 acres at the Sonny Bono/Salton Sea NWR. And partners will restore 88 acres and enhance another 137 acres of wetlands and associated habitats.

“Protecting the Salton Sea and revitalizing sensitive wildlife habitats is an important focus for our region,” said Congresswoman Mary Bono, whose district contains part of the project. “While this funding is a positive step, we must recognize the critical public and private partnerships and resources that are needed to ensure the future of the Salton Sea.”

In the Lower Colorado River project area, partners will restore 300 acres of habitat on the Cibola NWR in Arizona. For more information on NAWCA, go to www.ducks.org/nawca.

Grassland Notes

• **Education Center Arrives** — The new classroom/laboratory building for the Grassland Environmental Education Center rolled onto its permanent site the week of April 26 at the Los Banos Wildlife Area. The 24- by 60-foot structure will begin accommodating children and community groups by June, and is scheduled to be open year-round. “The center adds another dimension to the wildlife area, which was California’s first-designated wetlands in 1929,” said manager Bill Cook. “It will provide opportunities to teach children about the importance of wetlands habitat and associated uplands, and about water deliveries and the key roles played by hunters in the protection and continuation of our natural resources.” The center is co-sponsored by the Grassland Conservation & Education Fund and the California Department of Fish and Game. To learn more about it or to schedule a tour contact Candace Sigmond at (209) 704-4772.

* * *

• **Seeing the Big Picture** — The unique coalition of state and federal scientists, private landowners, county agencies and the Grassland Water and Resource Conservation districts are working together to forge decisions facing Merced County, focusing on landscape kinds of issues. Through the Grassland Habitat Management Coordination Committee, comprised of these diverse interests, members are looking at “the big picture.” The committee meets periodically. For information contact Veronica Woodruff at the GWD office, (209) 826-5188.

* * *

• **Banding Recoveries** — Between 1986 and 2003 some 5,125 ducks banded in Canada were recovered in California. Fifty-five percent of the ducks were mallards, followed by pintail at 29 percent and green-winged teal at 7 percent. Among the recoveries, 64 percent were banded in Alberta, 14 percent in Saskatchewan and 10 percent in British Columbia. Bird band recovery by each state can be found at: <http://arcntsrv.ducks.ca/public/birdbanding/viewer.htm>.

* * *

Private Clubs Benefit from CWA Projects

California Waterfowl Association has been busily working on private clubs in the Grassland Water District and Grassland Resource Conservation District. They have also been working on district projects to more efficiently deliver water as part of a two-year North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant.

The NAWCA grant was funded in 2005 and work will continue through 2007.

The majority of the projects are located within the Grassland Water District private clubs in both the north and south Grasslands. Funding is split between the grant and the private landowner.

Completed GWD projects included the Sorsky Weir Project, which replaced crossings, pipes, and weirs along 4 miles of the Sorsky Ditch. The project started at the Britto Gun Club and continued to the south past Webfoot Development

Company. The project will significantly help the delivery and drainage and make long term operations of the system much more user friendly.

The second GWD project focused on the ditch system adjacent to 216 Duck Club to the north and the Salinas Gun Club to the south and east. Drain water in this region eventually drains into Los Banos Creek. The area is well known for having drainage problems and with the completion of this project, water should drain much better and also flow along contour lines.

The last project consisted of completing the tail end of Eagle Ditch, which runs through the Lone Tree Gun Club, at the very end of this important system. Eagle Ditch is used as a main delivery and drainage ditch for a large portion of the north Grasslands. Water control will be vastly improved in this area of the north Grasslands.

USBR Cleanup Project

Lethal Selenium Found in Wild Bird Eggs

A dozen wild bird eggs plucked from nests by federal scientists on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley contained the same lethal levels of selenium that poisoned migrating waterfowl more than 20 years ago at Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge.

The eggs, collected in 2005 in fields that are part of a treatment project, were the worst detected in five years of monitoring at the project operated by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which recycles selenium-laced agricultural drain water by using it to irrigate crops.

The high selenium levels reinforce concerns of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that the USBR's drainage plans could endanger thousands of Central Valley waterfowl.

"They have to be extremely careful; that water is so potent, they can't make any mistakes," USFW biologist Joseph Skorupa told the *Los Angeles Times*. "If they make a mistake, they'll have dead birds."

The tainted eggs come from the Grassland Bypass project, which has otherwise been a success in reducing the flow of selenium-spiked water into the San Joaquin River. The project takes drainage from fields south of Los Banos and uses it to irrigate crops that can tolerate the soil salts that accumulate in

drain water.

A naturally occurring trace element, selenium is washed out of valley soils by irrigation. In drain water it can build to levels toxic to wildlife, a problem that first came to light at Kesterson, when widespread birth defects were found in birds that foraged in refuge ponds filled with farm drainage.

In the case of the 3,500-acre Grasslands reuse project, USBR coordinator Joe McGahan said it is unclear why selenium levels suddenly jumped in 2005 in eggs taken from the nests of black-necked stilts, a shorebird that is among several dozen species that frequent the site.

In 2006 Grassland managers took steps to reduce bird exposure to selenium by creating nearby habitat to lure waterfowl and shorebirds away from the reuse area and regraded drainage channels to make them less attractive to foraging birds.

The acreage devoted to such reuse areas could grow significantly under proposals under review by the USBR. The federal agency is under court order in a long-standing lawsuit to solve the drainage problem on roughly 379,000 acres of westside farmland.

The next report on the treatment project is due in December 2007.

Key Websites for Waterfowlers

Here is a list of websites of interest to waterfowlers and wetlands habitat owners.

- Ducks Unlimited International
– www.ducks.org
- Ducks Unlimited, California
– www.ca.ducks.org
- Ducks Unlimited, Canada
– www.ducks.ca
- Status of Wetlands
– <http://wetlands.fws.er.usgs.gov/wetlands/launch.html>
- California Waterfowl Association
– www.calwaterfowl.org
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
– www.fws.gov
- California Department of Fish & Game
– www.dfg.ca.gov

Public Area Statistics

The birds-per-hunter averages on California's public hunting areas improved last season, from 2.25 to 2.37. Hunters took 218,014 ducks, up 13 percent, and 12,0809 geese, up 39 percent over the previous season.

At Los Banos Wildlife Area, ducks increased to 9,752, up from 7,601 and geese totalled 194, up from 163, the best harvest in more than 20 years.

Landowner Meeting May 19 ... (from page 1)

Highlighting the session will be the presentation of the J. Martin Winton Conservation Award to former General Manager Don Marciochi.

Additional topics include:

- San Luis NWR Complex land acquisition and management update
- Outlook for spring irrigation, summer brood water and fall flood-up
- Best habitat management practices
- Water district vegetation control efforts
- Reports by Ducks Unlimited and California Waterfowl Association

An optional buffet lunch costing \$12 will be served at the conclusion of the meeting. Reservations for lunch must be made in advance by contacting Norma, Diane, or Veronica at the Grassland Water District, (209) 826-5188.

Return Service Requested

March/April 2007



Grassland Water District Team Roster

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