

IN MEMORIAM: THE PASSING OF AN ERA

Within less than a year, the Grasslands has had to deal with the unfortunate passing of three incredibly important people in the waterfowl community.

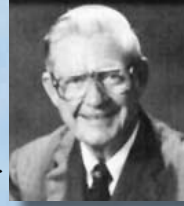
Walt Latham:

In November, Walt Latham of the Central California Irrigation District passed away during a hunting trip to Colorado. While his close hunting partner, Jim O'Banion, did all that he could to get Walt the quick attention that he needed, Walt, in his true character, felt all the attention was unnecessary and passed away later that night. Walt was not only a waterfowl enthusiast, but a water master's water master, and knew the canal systems of the region like the back of his calloused hands. His relationship with the GWD, and in particular GWD Water Master Scott Lower, goes back more than a century (Scott, that rib is for you and Walt), and the duo's historic coffee clutch gatherings at the GWD office were practically legendary. Walt's combination of being tough, crusty, yet fair and honest, made him a loveable if not occasionally insatiable person, which is precisely how we think Walt would wish to be remembered.



Dan Chapin:

Daniel Chapin who resided in Pleasant Hill, CA died April 27, 2008 at the age of 83 from natural causes.



Born November 14, 1926 in Gross Point, MI, Dan was the youngest son of Roy D. Chapin and Inez Tiedeman Chapin. His father was founder of the Hudson Motor Car Company and also served as Secretary of Transportation under president Hoover. Dan grew up in Michigan and then attended Yale University where he attained a degree in engineering. After serving in the Navy in 1946, Dan received an honorable discharge, married Wanda Rose Church in 1950, and went to work for the Dow Chemical Corporation. Dan and Wanda started a family and in 1962 the family moved west to the San Francisco bay area. Dan spent the next 20 years running Bessler Corporation while also actively pursuing his passion in life, protecting the environment. An avid duck hunter and fisherman, Dan saw firsthand the need to preserve the natural habitats of fish and waterfowl. In the mid 70's he decided to dedicate himself full time to conservation and became a director of the California Waterfowl Association. A modest man, Dan worked tirelessly throughout the next 20 years to protect the environment and our waterfowling heritage. Among his many accomplishments Dan led the charge to have lead removed from shotgun ammunition, got legislation passed protecting the migratory paths of waterfowl, and brought active public attention to the damaging affect of selenium in our wetlands and waterways. His greatest claim to fame when it comes to waterfowl was his intimate involvement in getting water supplies for key wetland areas, including the Grasslands, into the Central Valley Project Improvement Act of 1992. His creed in life was to always try and leave things in a little better shape than how you found them. His selfless commitment to the environment was his way of trying to make things better.



Don Marciochi:

Following nearly thirty-six years of tireless service to the GWD, Don retired in early 2007 to finally take time to enjoy things having nothing to do with water or waterfowl, which was long overdue. Unfortunately, his opportunity to "catch up" on his honey-do's and spend more time with his dear wife Kim, his brother Alan, and his children Nate and Lisa, was cut far too short. Don passed away suddenly in April during a visit to his family's get away cabin in Felton, California.

Words cannot describe the loss that the GWD has felt from Don's early departure. Don had continued to work with the GWD on a host of projects and his loss has left the GWD with a massive void that will be difficult to fill. "If there was ever a man who gave more than he took, it was Don", said Dave Widell, GWD general manager. "Don was a deep thinker who didn't wear his emotions on his sleeve, but for those of us who were truly honored to know him as a close friend and spend one on one time with him after the duties of the day, I have to say there were few whose company I enjoyed more, on a truly personal basis," Widell added.

GRASSLAND RESOURCE ZONE ADOPTED

In an effort to better define a Grassland "buffer zone" for the purposes of working with local planners and on such projects as the California High Speed Rail, the GWD, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, and Ducks Unlimited developed the Grassland Resource Zone (GRZ) map which translates proposed buffer recommendations from various land use studies done in the region to actual roads, waterways and physical contours which is intended to better clarify the Grassland Ecological Area's buffer needs to planners, developers and conservation organizations. The map was recently adopted by the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture as the official "Grassland Focus Area"... Good news for the Grasslands!!

"It's critical that we establish a line which clearly articulates our

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Grassland Wetlands
22759 S. Mercey Springs Rd.,
Los Banos 93635.

Telephone (209) 826-5188
Fax (209) 826-4984
Website: <http://www.grasslandwetlands.org>
E-Mail: veronica@grasslandwetlands.org

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Grassland Staff

Dave Widell, *General Manager*
Scott Lower, *Assistant General Manager*
Veronica Woodruff, *Mgr.—Administration*
Rob Kocher, *Mgr.—Water Deliveries*
Joe Verissimo, *Maintenance Supervisor*
Richard Wright, *Biologist*
Candace Sigmond, *GEECe Ed. Coordinator*

Cooperating Agencies

Greg Gerstenberg, (209) 826-3464
California Department of Fish and Game
Shawn Milar, (209) 826-3508
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Malia Hildebrandt, (209) 722-4119 (x3)
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Chris Hildebrandt, (209) 761-8400
Ducks Unlimited

Grassland Water District Board of Directors

Pepper Snyder, *President*
Sprig Haven Farms
(408) 298-3134
Doug Federighi, *Vice President*
Gustine Land & Cattle
(510) 635-1155
Byron Hisey
Hollister L&C
(209) 862-2174
Bob Nardi
Hollister L&C/WillowFarms
(510) 352-3059
Tom Mackey
Riverfield
(510) 523-2425

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(209) 592-2821
Keith Toon
Hollister L&C
(510) 352-6228
Dennis Campini
Stillbow Gun Club
(209) 761-5511
Bill Parham
Coast Cattle
(831) 659-3550
Dan Whitehead
Coast Cattle
(559) 285-9754

GRASSLAND RESOURCE ZONE ADOPTED **CONTINUED...**

collective interests in not only protecting the core of the Grasslands, but also provides for adequate elbow room so as to not have the values of the core area encroached upon," said Pepper Snyder, GWD President. "While the line carries no regulatory authority per se, it was produced in consultation with regulatory agencies which are charged with enforcing the protection of this critical resource. We are

hoping that this map will be helpful to those who wish to know where we would prefer to see the maintenance of a rural, agricultural buffer rather than intensive development or increased parcelization," he added.

Those interested in receiving electronic or hard copy maps of the GRZ, contact GWD/ CWA biologist Rich Wright, at rich_wright@calwaterfowl.org.



DUCKS UNLIMITED COMPLETES WETLAND RESTORATION AND ENHANCEMENTS IN TULARE LAKE BASIN NAWCA GRANT

Ducks Unlimited and its partners recently completed work on the Tulare Lake Basin Wetland Enhancement Project, which was partly funded through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. In all, 25,398 acres of wetlands and associated wildlife habitats were conserved, at a cost of \$3,879,738. Of this total, \$986,540 in NAWCA funds were granted to Ducks Unlimited. Wetland Restoration and Enhancement work was completed on public and private lands. Several match and grant funded projects were completed at the Kern National Wildlife Refuge, conserving 7,565 acres of habitat. Several private lands also benefited from the NAWCA program, including the ECLA complex, Etchegary Farms, Gooselake Holding Co., Kahala Ranch, Robin's Roost, and Wheatville Ranch where more than 5,500 acres of wetlands and associated habitats were conserved.

One of the key project sites involved restoring hydrology and improving water conveyance on the east portion of historic Goose Lake, one of the three major wetlands in Tulare Basin; Tulare and Buena Vista Lakes being the others. The purpose of the Goose Lake project was to restore hydrology and improve water conveyance within Goose Lake. Water delivery sloughs were excavated on the upper edges of the basin to improve water delivery to wetlands. This project restored a large complex of wetlands in the Goose Lake basin and will benefit wintering and migrating waterfowl species, shorebirds, wading birds, songbirds, and a host of other wildlife species that utilize wetland habitats in the southern San Joaquin Valley. In addition, riparian areas and sloughs restored through this project will provide additional habitat for the Buena Vista Lake Shrew, a small mouse-like species that was put on the endangered species list in 2003.

DESPITE LIMITED FUNDING, SUPPORT FOR SHARE PROGRAM GROWS IN YEAR TWO

The Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) Program has once again proven successful, demonstrating that a private lands access program can indeed work in California. In its second year, the program—which was implemented by California Waterfowl Association (CWA) and California Outdoor Heritage Alliance (COHA) staff as well as CWA's North Coast Chapter, and DFG expanded to include 3 additional properties available for public hunting and received significantly greater hunter demand. No hunting accidents or vandalism were reported this season, and feedback from both landowners and hunters was again positive overall.

Although private grant funding was substantially limited this year to implement SHARE, landowners participating in the program agreed to accept lower payments while hunters were willing to pay daily access fees similar to what is required to hunt Type A Wildlife Areas and National Wildlife Refuges.

Fortunately, the Fish and Game Commission also voted 3-0 to request the Department of Fish and Game to dedicate \$100,000 to support the Program in subsequent years. COHA staff recently met with the Director of Fish and Game to help determine an appropriate source of funding from DFG's budget, and the Department is currently finalizing that effort.

The SHARE Program was authorized in 2003 through CWA-sponsored legislation, AB 396 (Harman). As required by the legislation, a pilot program was implemented to determine overall landowner and hunter interest. With the pilot program now approved by the California Fish and Game Commission and funding in the process of being secured,

the Department of Fish and Game will eventually be required to implement the program on a statewide basis.

At least 18 other states have voluntary private land access programs, and literally millions of acres of private lands have been opened to public hunting. The main objective of California's program is offer low-cost private land hunting opportunities in an effort to retain existing hunters and encourage other individuals to take up hunting for the first time. Other goals include fostering improved relations between hunters and landowners, financially supporting farmers and other landowners who provide public access for hunting and encouraging responsible hunter behavior in the field.

Hunting opportunities through SHARE are currently limited to waterfowl and upland game birds only, but could be expanded in the future to include any game species, including deer, wild pigs and other big game species.

While hunting success this season appeared slightly lower than last year, particularly during the special late season north coast Aleutian goose hunt, many hunters participating in the program again expressed strong support for continuing SHARE. In fact, demand for hunting opportunities has grown so quickly that ensuring a reasonable chance of a hunter being drawn for the program while avoiding overcrowding issues will likely be a major challenge facing SHARE in the future.

It should also be noted that many landowners have once again commented that the program has helped to achieve their depredation control or financial objectives, and that they would like to enroll their lands into the SHARE Program for the 2008-09 hunting season.

DUCKS UNLIMITED ADDS POSITION TO GRASSLAND TEAM



Paul Link, DU Biologist

Ducks Unlimited is proud to announce the addition of a new biologist, Paul Link, to our conservation team working in the South Pacific Flyway. Paul will be stationed at the

Grassland Water District Office and will be assisting Chris Hildebrandt in increasing DU's conservation efforts in the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California area, including the Lower Colorado River. Paul earned an A.S. in Wildlife & Fisheries Management from Minot State University-Bottineau, in Bottineau, ND; a B.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences from South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD; and, his M.S. in Renewable Natural Resources from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. Paul did his thesis on, "Survival, habitat use, and movements of female mallards in southwestern Louisiana." He has a great diversity of waterfowl related experience including capturing and radio-marking sandhill cranes, duck banding, waterfowl nest searching and his thesis research. Paul rates his past work experience with DU securing perpetual grassland and wetland easements on the Missouri Coteau in northwest ND as his most rewarding achievement to date. Please welcome Paul to the Grasslands team!

You can reach Paul by calling (209) 761-8401.





Photo: Gary Zahm

MARSH CHRONICLES: CANVASBACK HARVEST INCREASE HELPS GRASSLAND HUNTERS

As the duck season approached this past year, there was one large variable entering opening day. Was the limit one or two canvasbacks? Technically the answer to that question was one. The two bird bag limit was officially designated by the Department of Fish and Game on October 25th, the Thursday of the opening week. Grassland hunters certainly could not have had this happen soon enough. Harvest of canvasbacks reached historic proportions during the 2007/2008 season on many of the district clubs, particularly in the South Grasslands. Some clubs in the South Grasslands are now shooting more canvasbacks and redheads than pintail and widgeon – a rather remarkable feat. Another positive: canvasbacks can show up in large numbers early in the duck season, providing a great hunting opportunity when many other waterfowl species, such as widgeon, have not yet arrived in large numbers.

So what caused the confusion in regulations? The framework for waterfowl hunting is set by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and adopted by individual states. States have the option of taking less than offered by the USFWS, but can not take more. This year, the USFWS surprised many by allowing a 2 bird harvest, due to record numbers of canvasbacks counted on the breeding grounds. The numbers reached 865,000 birds spread over the vast

prairies and boreal forest. This increase in allowable harvest was not projected by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and therefore was not included in their California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documentation. This documentation is made available to the public for 45 days. With the additional canvasback option, DFG was forced to act quickly with a supplemental review process. After the process was accomplished and with actions taken by the Fish and Game Commission and subsequently the Office of Administrative Law, the limit was increased to 2 on October 25th.

Canvasbacks, which average over 34 inches in wingspan and weigh almost 3 pounds, are truly one of the most majestic of all waterfowl, capable of reaching 72 mph. Canvasbacks are fairly easy for hunters to spot with their typical “V” shaped flock pattern, large body size, and distinguished bill shape and color patterns.

Wintering numbers and harvest of canvasbacks in the Grasslands has been on the rise for some time with the passage of CVPIA (1992) and shifting wintering patterns from the San Francisco Bay. Harvest of canvasbacks in the Grassland Water District during the 2007/2008 duck season was a record for many private hunt clubs that voluntarily compile their own statistics.

FROM THE FIELD...

• Pacific Flyway Decoy Event Announced

The PFDA will be hosting its 38th Annual Wildlife Art Festival on July 12 and 13th, 9am to 4pm, in Sacramento. A fundraising event will be held on Saturday and will include guns, trips, decoys and more exciting items. The event will be held at the Double Tree Hotel near Arden Way.

For more information, go to pacificflyway.org or call 925-628-9449.

• Yarris Named CWA Director Of Policy

CWA has resumed its independent policy work with the hiring of Greg Yarris, long-time CWA biologist and staffer. Formerly, Yarris was Director of Waterfowl and Wetlands Programs for CWA. “My goal is help to bridge the gap between policy and biology. Considering the societal pressures and competition for land and water resources that is occurring throughout the West, I think the importance of combining these two issue areas is more important than ever” said Yarris.

“Greg and I had the chance to work together for a few years in the mid 90’s while I was working in governmental affairs for CWA, and I have to say he always struck me as a real talent,” said Dave Widell, GWD General Manager. “His ability to translate waterfowl science to policy makers, combined with an impressive set of academic credentials, will provide him the cache necessary to go toe to toe with top legislative staff and leadership.”

Yarris can be contacted at 916-648-1406 or greg_yarris@calwaterfowl.org.

TURN OFF THE XBOX AND GET YOUR KIDS OUTSIDE! TURK STATION AND CALIFORNIA WATERFOWL OFFER A YOUTH CAMP IN COALINGA



Those who spend time outdoors already instinctively know that outdoor activity encourages both mental and physical stimulation that benefit kids for the rest of their lives. Recent studies have confirmed that getting kids outdoors helps build happier, healthier individuals.

There is no better way to ensure a good outdoor experience than to empower a child with the skills and confidence to explore their own connections to nature. During the week of June 17-21, 2008, Grasslands area youth will have the opportunity to build their outdoor skills and confidence at a Youth Hunter Camp at Turk Station (just over an hour south of Los Banos in Coalinga).

Kids of any ability will have a chance to learn about wildlife habitat management, go fishing, learn basic shooting skills with .22 rifles and shotguns, and learn wildlife identification skills while hiking with friends and experts. Beginning campers will complete the required Hunter Safety Program, and upon successful completion will receive their hunter safety certificates. Experienced campers are also welcome, and those who already have a hunter safety certificate will get a chance to learn advanced skills. At the end of each day, all the kids will camp under the stars and reflect on what they learned. Each year, hundreds of California youth get outdoors through California Waterfowl camps and events. With partnerships and dedicated volunteers, California Waterfowl provides flexible and accessible camps to develop life-long connections and interests in outdoor recreation and wildlife. Every child can benefit from the skills taught at the camps and will walk away with a stronger sense of themselves.

To view photos from last year's event, learn more about the Youth Camps Program, or to explore California Waterfowl, visit www.calwaterfowl.org.

Who?

Youth ages 10-15

What?

A Weekend Outdoors

When?

June 17-21, 2008

Where?

Turk Station, Coalinga

How Much?

\$250*

for all activities, certification, meals, and accommodations
**a limited number of scholarships are available for low-income families*

Reservations:

Turk Station
24570 W. Phelps Avenue
Coalinga, CA 93210
(559) 935-1902

Please call to reserve your spot by May 31, 2008

WEE WIGGLERS VISIT GEECE

BY CANDACE SIGMOND, EDUCATION COORDINATOR



GEECe had the wonderful opportunity to play host for the Wee Wigglers, a preschool reading hour sponsored by the Los Banos Rotary Club. GEECe participates in the reading hour on the first Thursday of each month. Topics encompass domestic animals (pet and farm) and wildlife; where they can and cannot live and what they need to survive.

On April 24th, 17 preschoolers and 19 chaperones arrived at the Center for a picnic lunch, a walk and talk around the Van Atta Marsh and wetland wildlife coloring. It was a relaxed afternoon excursion for children and adults to view a wetland habitat with a guide. It was a time when everyone took a deep breath and listened; toads croaking, the killdeer screech, coot whistles and blackbirds calling to a mate. Only half-way through the walk, our bird list included the snowy egret, red-winged blackbirds, western kingbirds, northern harriers, the red-tailed hawk, killdeer, three pairs of mallards, coots and the northern shoveler. If we were not looking at the sky we were looking in the mud for mammal and bird tracks. Everyone was fascinated by the sudden appearance and disappearance of five young western harvest mice, more so than if they had been found in their homes. It was the youngster's chance to explore a new landscape with unfamiliar wildlife but it was also an opportunity for

GEECe to demonstrate the intrinsic value of wildlife and the need for wetland habitat.

The Grassland Water District and DFG are active partners in the Grassland Environmental Education Center, formerly a fieldtrip facility for Grades 3 through 5. With the move and set-up of GEECe at the Los Banos Wildlife Area many unique possibilities have opened to the public; preschool through college and adult groups. Please contact GEECe Ed Coordinator, Candace Sigmond for details at 209-704-4772.



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Design, Layout & Production:

Beckrest Graphic Design
209.367.1408 • beckrest@mac.com

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Address all correspondence to:

The Grassland Wetlands
22759 S. Mercey Springs Road
Los Banos, CA 93635

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GWD CRACKS DOWN ON CATTLE DAMAGE TO CANALS

In 2006, the GWD Board passed policy which specifically states that any damage caused to GWD facilities from watering cattle must either be repaired by the landowner themselves within a specified amount of time, or the GWD will repair the damage and bill the landowner directly. The GWD has also made it clear that if such damage is repaired by the District, and subsequently not paid for, the District will file liens against properties to recoup those costs. The District took just such an action this year and will continue to do so unless landowners who do graze their lands take action to keep cattle out of GWD facilities.

“This isn’t an attempt to be punitive toward those landowners who do graze cattle, but folks need to understand that damage to our canals from cattle costs ALL landowners,

not just the ones who are grazing,” said Bob Nardi, GWD Maintenance Committee member. “Costs to repair damaged cattle banks can run into the thousands in terms of excavator time and the GWD will not be bearing those costs any longer,” he added.

Landowners who have not responded to billing notices will be ineligible to receive water in the upcoming year, and will face liens against their lands followed by legal action if necessary.

For more information on the GWD's Cattle Damage Policy, contact Dave Widell at 209-826-5188 or dwidell@grasslandwetlands.org.

