

Grassland Resource Conservation District Awards Dr. Fritz Reid the J. Martin Winton Conservation Award



At the GWD annual landowner meeting, Grassland RCD President William Parham presented the J. Martin Winton Conservation Award “for

outstanding achievement in National Resource Conservation” to Dr. Fritz Reid of Ducks Unlimited. The GRCD represents over 170 duck clubs in the San Joaquin Valley of California and the largest remaining wetland/grassland complex in California. The award is named after long-time conservationist J. Martin Winton who for nearly 60 years battled to protect rivers, wetlands and water of the San Joaquin Valley.

Speaking at the award were Grassland Water District Directors Pepper Snyder and Doug Federighi (also a member of Ducks Unlimited Conservation Program Committee), as well as District Manager Dave Widell. Federighi spoke of Reid’s effort throughout the flyway, from Barrow to Baja. He spoke of the effort to educate

duck hunters to the challenges and potential solutions for habitats across the flyway. Most especially, he remarked to the recent efforts with Ducks Unlimited and Pew’s International Boreal Conservation Campaign in helping conserve the entire Canadian Boreal Forest and helping guide full protection for at least fifty percent of this critical waterfowl habitat. This is critical for a wintering ground such as the Grasslands where principal harvest includes green-winged teal, American widgeon, ring-necked duck, and northern pintail.

Upon accepting the award, Reid said “I am humbled to accept this award because of the great efforts of Grasslands RCD and Water District to protect the integrity of these critical wetlands, but also because of who J. Martin Winton was. Martin joined Ducks Unlimited in its founding year of 1937 and went on to serve as a national trustee from 1967 to 1980. Martin was tireless in his pursuit to conserve the entire Pacific Flyway for ducks, geese and shorebirds.”

added. “As a result of the support of our landowners, the GWD, and donations to the Grassland Fund, we were able to bring on some top notch legal and policy advocates who did a great job in laying out, in detail, what our contracts say, what they require, and the circumstances under which water shortages can be imposed on refuges.”

The Grassland Fund is a non-profit organization exclusively devoted to Grassland issues, be them legal, conservation or education orientated. Earlier this year, the Fund made a request of Grassland landownership to

Continued on inside...

GWD IN SEARCH OF GROUNDWATER TO SUPPLEMENT SUPPLIES

In an effort to identify additional water supplies for spring and summer irrigations, the GWD is looking for interested landowners with access to suitable quality supplies to offset surface water supplies when needed and when appropriate.

“While pumping groundwater on an unlimited basis is no solution for either wetlands or agriculture, the fact is that it has become apparent that in some years, pumping will be necessary to pull off limited irrigations and maintain some summer water in the Grasslands,” said David Widell, GWD general manager. Currently, the GWD enters into agreements with individual landowners to purchase groundwater and then makes that water available to the Bureau of Reclamation for all refuge needs within the Grasslands.

Continued on inside...

GRASSLAND FUND TACKLES WATER



The newly established Grassland Fund is already working to raise funds to help protect your water supplies and respond to issues critical to the Grasslands.

“As many already know, this water year has been very challenging hydrologically, but also legally,” said David Widell, Grassland Fund executive director. “While our water situation was largely in the hands of God and the Bureau of Reclamation, this year posed a very tough set of circumstances where our contractual rights to refuge water were actually being called into question, and that is a big problem,” he

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Grassland Staff

David Widell, *General Manager*
Mike Gardner, *Chief of Field Operations*
Veronica Woodruff, *Treasurer-Controller*
Tim Poole, *North Grasslands Water Deliveries*
Rob Kocher, *South Grasslands Water Deliveries*
Richard Wright, *Biologist*
Candace Sigmond, *GEECe Ed. Coordinator*

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Shawn Milar, (209) 826-3508
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Malia Hildebrandt, (209) 722-4119 (x3)
Natural Resources Conservation Service
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Ducks Unlimited

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Dan Whitehead
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GWD IN SEARCH OF GROUNDWATER **CONTINUED...**

Widell says that water quality is key, and that pumping in all years would neither be prudent or responsible. However, he emphasizes that it will be critical to maintain some level of groundwater infrastructure so that in years such as this,

the Grasslands can keep the floor from falling too low.

Landowners who are interested in having their groundwater tested or an existing well examined should call Scott Lower at the GWD office, 209-826-5188.

GRASSLAND FUND TACKLES WATER **CONTINUED...**

provide a voluntary donation based on a per acre pledge. "If we can get every club to spread this effort among the landscape, the request ends up being pretty modest but results in a sizeable annual contribution that supplements and enhances the efforts of the GWD and all our partners," said Widell.

Donations to the Grassland Fund should be mailed to 22759 S. Mercey Springs Rd, Los Banos, CA 93635. Donors will receive a donation receipt for their records. Contact David Widell or Veronica Woodruff at 209-826-5188, dwidell@grasslandwetlands.org.

WELCOME NEW GWD STAFF



Jessica Wright
Administrative Assistant



Duke Hass
Maintenance



Ric Ortega
Water Quality Monitoring Supervisor



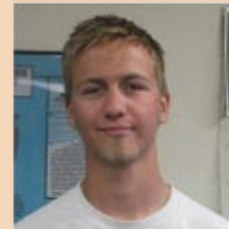
Ty Widell
FBI Witness Protection Program



Patrick Rahilly
Water Quality Monitoring Scientist



Kevin Vella
Water Quality Sampling



Forrest Hansen
Seasonal Maintenance Crew

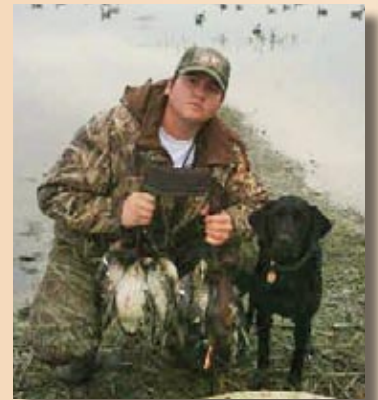


Roger Huff
Maintenance Department

IN MEMORIAM

Cody Anthenien

On February 26th, Cody Anthenien of the Grassland Water District was killed in a tragic accident on his way to a waterfowl dinner committee which he had become very involved with. Cody was a cheerful, bright and genuine young man who had just recently turned 21 years of age and whose adult life had really just begun. He will be sorely missed by all of us. His loss gave us all pause as to how precious life is and how being taken so young is the worst tragedy of all. As Cody was a devout rodeo enthusiast, we offer a toast to our young friend and wish him well as he joins his fellow Ghost Riders In The Sky.



GRASSLAND WATER DISTRICT BEEFS UP WATER MONITORING

Grassland Water District, in cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Game and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, has been awarded a grant by the US Bureau of Reclamation to develop a real time water quality monitoring and decision support system. Wetland managers need information on water volumes and water quality to optimize water use on their wetlands for the benefit of wildlife and optimal habitat diversity. This project will augment existing water quality monitoring efforts throughout the Grassland Ecological Area. The Web-Enabled Real Time

Monitor System will broadcast the volume of water and salt concentration of flows at major water sources entering the wetlands of the Grassland Ecological Area, and major outflows draining from the region. Data from this monitoring effort will provide information to land use managers which will serve to help better understand the dynamics of water quantity and quality used to manage the Grassland ecosystem.

Existing monitoring station retro-fitting as well as new installation efforts are currently underway with the goal of completion by Fall flood-up 2009. For security purposes in

rural locations of the Grassland Resource Conservation District private land owners with property bordering major supply or drainage canals may be asked if they are willing to allow a monitoring station to be installed on their property.

The Grassland Water District Real Time Water Quality Monitoring Website is available to the public at <http://www.ysieconet.com/public/WebUI/Default.aspx?hidCustomerID=99>

Questions?
Contact Ric Ortega at rortega@grasslandwetlands.org

DOES YOUR DUCK CLUB NEED AN EXTREME MAKEOVER?

Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU) is developing a proposal to request funds through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act to restore or enhance wetlands and associated habitats in the San Joaquin Valley, specifically Merced and Fresno Counties. As always, DU is seeking to develop a well rounded proposal that will improve water conservation and have positive and long-lasting impacts on waterfowl using the San Joaquin Valley. These funds, and the associated wetland restoration and enhancement work, will also benefit the sportsmen, and aid in continuing our efforts in the conservation and protection of habitat for our beloved waterfowl resource.

Projects that include water conservation or wetland/riparian restoration or enhancement will have a higher chance of receiving funding than those that generally consist of normal maintenance activities. "A duck club that has never taken advantage of the various funding sources available, and is in need of water conveyance improvements on all of their wetlands to conserve water and gain the ability to optimize growth of annual waterfowl seed producing plants, will have a better chance of receiving funding than a club that has received wetland funding assistance in the past and just needs a swale and water control structure," states Chris Hildebrandt, DU's Regional Biologist. "We have a limited amount of funding available and more projects than we can fund, so we have to prioritize where we work. We have

to strive to get the most ducks for our buck!"

Generally speaking, if you are able to efficiently get the water on and off of your club, then you are making the best use of your water and most likely just need to conduct periodic maintenance (mowing, discing, burning, seeding) to provide optimal habitat conditions. However, if you are unable to flood up or draw down the water in your wetlands efficiently and completely, and find that undesirable vegetation outcompetes desirable vegetation, then perhaps your club needs an Extreme Makeover. The NAWCA grant proposal guidelines require at least a 1:1 match of non-Federal funds to Federal grant funds in order to be eligible. Since most of the non-Federal match for this proposal has been identified, landowners will not have to pay the full 50% toward project costs, but likely a consistent amount across the board somewhere between 10% and 25%.

This proposal will have water conservation as a key objective of all of the projects to conserve this precious resource, because as Dave Widell, Grassland Water District General Manager states, "Without the water, there will be no ducks and no duck hunting!" Interested landowners should contact DU biologists Chris Hildebrandt, (209) 761-8400, childebrandt@ducks.org, or Derek Mynear, (209) 761-8401, dmynear@ducks.org to see if their property qualifies for this opportunity.

HUNT AT MAR LAND

Zachary Westbrook with his dog Nellie following a hunt at Mar Land and Cattle. Zachary told us he had a great time on the hunt and attributed his shooting prowess to his grandmother, Veronica "Dead Eye" Woodruff.



FEDERIGHI NEW DU VICE CHAIR

Doug Federighi of GWD was recently named Vice Chair of Ducks Unlimited's National Conservation Committee where he will be lead on conservation policy issues. "This is great for Doug, great for Ducks Unlimited, and great for the Grasslands," said Pepper Snyder, GWD President. "Doug's wealth of experience and background in policy and water will bring an important voice to DU's National Conservation Committee," he added.

DEER RETURN TO THE GRASSLANDS

By Greg Gerstenberg
DFG Wildlife Biologist



Released collared doe

Few hunters in the Grasslands can ever remember seeing a deer out in the marsh or jumping a deer instead of a pheasant from the thick brush. Deer were once present in some areas of the Grasslands, with the last reported deer in 1976 on San Luis N.W.R. However, seeing a deer is now possible in some areas of the Grasslands. In 2003, the Department of Fish and Game began a project to reestablish deer into historic habitat along the San Joaquin River in central Merced County. Relocation efforts are known to have poor survival rates and the effectiveness of establishing a new population was unknown. This project was designed to improve survival by reducing capture related stress. Between 2003 and 2006, 57 deer were translocated from the coast range to riparian habitat along the San Joaquin River. All the translocated adult deer were fitted with radio transmitting collars to monitor movements and survival. The results were that many of the relocated deer stayed in the release area and survived to reproduce. Collared deer survival was higher than any previously attempted effort with 42% of translocated deer surviving in the release area through at least one reproductive season. Some deer did return to the original capture sites or were recaptured and returned when it appeared they would not stay in the release area.

The efforts have provided a self sustaining population that is slowly building. Currently deer born in the release area over the past 5 years are now producing fawns of their own. Prior efforts to reestablish populations using similar techniques required 10-15 years before the reestablishment efforts provided significant population growth. After only a few years since this project was initiated, deer can now be observed on a regular basis near the release areas. Fawn production has been improving each year, and deer are slowly spreading into new areas. The outlook for deer in the Grasslands is bright.



Chemically immobilized deer is blindfolded prior to processing

to observe or harvest deer within historic range of the Grasslands.

This project was funded by the Deer Herd Management Plan Implementation Program. The project was supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California State Parks, the Stevinson Corporation, and Diablo Grande.



Deer is released from a transport crate

FROM THE FIELD...

Email, Email, Email!!!

If you have yet to provide your email address to the GWD or Grassland Fund, PLEASE do so! In this way, we can easily and cheaply communicate with our partners and landowners and alert you to things that require quick responses. We can also merge your personal addresses to a legislative database to quickly put you in contact with key legislators, based on your zip codes, should we need to do an Action Alert.

If you haven't done so, please email Veronica Woodruff at veronica@grasslandwetlands.org so we can have your email address on file. Please include your full name, phone numbers, and the property or organization you are associated with.

Gate Lockdown Continues

The GWD has had great support by Grassland Landowners in keeping our water gates locked and operated by authorized GWD personnel. A big THANK YOU from our staff and Board of Directors for all your support! As we have mentioned in previous editions of Grassland Explorer, we are tightening up enforcement each year, particularly in years such as this. While we do our best to provide verbal warnings, the GWD will follow-up with those where the problem has not been resolved with a more formal warning, and eventually fines. Should any landowners see that their gates have had locks removed or have been tampered with by someone else, please notify the GWD immediately and we will quickly investigate the matter. All staff are required to keep water gates locked AT ALL TIMES, which helps all landowners and ensures we fairly and equitably distribute water on a pro rate basis to all wetlands within the GWD. Should you have any question or know of gates where locks are missing, please contact GWD Operations Chief Mike Gardner at 209-826-5188.

GWD Elections Coming in November

Elections for the GWD Board of Directors will be held on November 3, 2009. Landowners interested in running for election must file with the Merced County Election Department between July 13 and August 7, 2009. Forms will be available at the GWD office in mid-June, or you can go to www.co.merced.ca.us/elections. The director candidates must be either (a) be a holder of title to land within the Grassland Water District or (b) the legal representative of a holder of title to land within the Grassland Water District.

DFG ANNOUNCES 2009 WATERFOWL POPULATION ESTIMATES

A 2009 Department of Fish and Game (DFG) waterfowl survey indicates that the number of mallards statewide remains steady, but the overall duck population has declined.

Conducted by DFG in late April and early May, the Waterfowl Breeding Survey estimates that there are 510,800 ducks of all

species in the state. This is an eight percent decrease from 2008, when DFG found 554,300 ducks. Mallards, the most abundant duck in the survey, remain essentially unchanged in number - DFG found 302,000 mallards this year, up only slightly from the 297,100 found in 2008. However, the number of mallards is currently 18 percent below the long-term average for this species.

“Preliminary age ratios in the mallard harvest indicated poor production in 2008,” said Shaun Oldenburger, a wildlife biologist with DFG’s Waterfowl Program. “We expect better waterfowl production this year, due to increased late spring precipitation that improved habitat conditions in some areas.”

The DFG survey covered the majority of the suitable waterfowl nesting habitat in the state, including wetland and agricultural habitats in northeastern California, the Central Valley from Red Bluff to Bakersfield, and the Suisun and Napa-Sonoma marshes. Since 1955, DFG has conducted this survey with a fixed-wing aircraft; California Waterfowl, a cooperative partner, provides assistance by surveying a sample of transects by helicopter.

Currently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is conducting its own breeding population surveys throughout Alaska, the north-central United States and Canada, all of which are primary breeding grounds for California’s wintering duck population. This data, along with the waterfowl population estimates from DFG and other states, is used by USFWS in setting regulation frameworks for outside dates, maximum season lengths and maximum bag limits in the Pacific Flyway.

The USFWS frameworks will be considered by the Fish and Game Commission when setting California waterfowl hunting regulations in August.

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2008-2009 Waterfowl Harvest Summary for Private Duck Clubs In the North and South Grasslands as of 5/10/09 - By Rich Wright, CWA

Number of Clubs Reporting:

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
North Grasslands:	22	22	23	19
South Grasslands:	24	24	24	18
	46	46	47	37

Average Number of Waterfowl shot per Hunter Day (7 bird limit, 93 day season) at Private Duck Clubs in the North and South Grasslands

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
North Grasslands	3.74	4.63	4.67	4.65
South Grasslands	3.82	4.39	4.03	4.07
Range	1.97-6.03	2.10-6.29	2.02-6.17	2.06-6.37

Average Number of Waterfowl shot per Hunter Day (7 bird limit, 93 day season) at Public and Private Hunting Areas

	2007-08	2008-09	Change from 07-08
N. Grasslands	4.67	4.65	-0.02
S. Grasslands	4.03	4.07	+0.04
N. Frietas	2.12	2.60	+0.48
S. Frietas	2.08	2.04	-0.04
Gadwall	3.22	2.88	-0.34
Merced	2.63	2.65	+0.02
Mendota	2.38	2.32	-0.06
Volta	2.62	2.89	+0.27
San Luis	2.21	2.27	+0.06
W. Bear Creek	2.35	2.49	+0.14
Salt Slough	1.93	2.20	+0.27
Las Banos	1.88	1.78	-0.10
Kesterson	1.69	1.94	+0.25
China Island	2.23	2.36	+0.13

Hunter success in the Grassland Ecological Area the past ten years:

Year	North Grassland duck clubs*	South Grassland duck clubs*	Merced NWR	Kesterson NWR	San Luis NWR	China Island WA	Los Banos WA	Salt Slough WA	Volta WA	Mendota WA
1999-00	3.55	3.57	2.13	1.38	1.82	1.03	1.39	1.49	1.89	1.95
2000-01	3.55	2.86	1.92	1.34	1.90	1.02	1.27	1.48	1.53	1.61
2001-02	3.61	2.69	2.48	1.75	2.18	1.64	1.07	1.27	1.73	1.94
2002-03	3.25	2.59	2.33	1.62	1.96	1.61	1.37	1.42	1.75	1.80
2003-04	3.41	3.41	2.74	1.29	1.94	1.26	1.55	1.42	1.70	1.85
2004-05	4.31	3.69	2.72	2.03	2.52	2.05	1.75	1.69	1.84	2.22
2005-06	3.74	3.82	2.53	1.84	2.42	1.65	1.74	1.84	1.96	2.37
2006-07	4.57	4.39	2.69	1.86	2.16	1.70	2.04	2.14	3.07	2.07
2007-08	4.67	4.03	2.63	1.69	2.21	2.23	1.88	1.93	2.62	2.41
2008-09	4.65	4.07	2.65	1.94	2.27	2.36	1.78	2.20	2.89	2.32

Data adjusted 2001 *

Species Composition of Waterfowl Harvested on Private Duck Clubs in the North Grasslands

	2007-08	2008-09	Change from 2007-08
G. W. Teal	51.0%	59.1%	+8.1 %
Shoveler	20.9%	13.3%	-7.6%
Pintail	6.2%	4.7%	-1.5%
Mallard	3.6%	3.9%	+0.3%
Cinn. Teal	3.8%	3.7%	-0.1%
Wigeon	5.9%	6.3%	+0.4%
Gadwall	4.2%	3.4%	-0.6%
Other	1.6%	1.1%	-0.5%
Geese	0.3%	0.6%	+0.3%
Ring-necked duck	0.5%	2.0%	+1.5 %
Canvasback	1.3%	0.0%	-1.3%
Redhead	0.7%	0.8%	+ 0.1%

Species Composition of Waterfowl Harvested on Private Duck Clubs in the South Grasslands

	2007-08	2008-09	Change from 2007-08
G.W. Teal	49.5%	57.0%	+8.5%
Shoveler	19.3%	12.3%	-7.0%
Pintail	6.2%	5.9%	-0.3%
Mallard	3.1%	2.2%	-0.9%
Gadwall	3.9%	3.3%	-0.6%
Wigeon	6.9%	10.7%	+3.8%
Cinn. Teal	2.9%	2.1%	-0.8%
Other	2.6%	1.7%	-0.9%
Geese	0.5%	0.9%	+0.2%
Ring-necked duck	1.2%	3.0%	+1.8%
Canvasback	3.0%	0.0%	-3.0%
Redhead	1.0%	0.9%	-0.1%

Top three duck species harvested on private duck clubs in the North and South Grasslands over the past ten years:

Year	#1 Species	#2 Species	#3 Species
1998-99	Green-winged teal	Northern shoveler	Gadwall
1999-00	Green-winged teal	Northern shoveler	Northern pintail
2000-01	Green-winged teal	Northern shoveler	Mallard
2001-02	Green-winged teal	Northern shoveler	Wigeon
2002-03	Green-winged teal	Northern shoveler	Wigeon
2003-04	Green-winged teal	Northern shoveler	Mallard
2004-05	Green-winged teal	Northern shoveler	Wigeon
2005-06	Green-winged teal	Northern shoveler	Wigeon
2006-07	Green-winged teal	Northern shoveler	Wigeon
2007-08	Green-winged teal	Northern-shoveler	Wigeon
2008-09	Green-winged teal	Northern-shoveler	Wigeon

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CALLING ALL COOKS...

Duck Breast with Prosciutto and Espresso Crust and Blackberry Sauce

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1/3 cup dry white wine
- 1/3 cup orange juice
- 2 tablespoons raspberry vinegar
- 1 1/4 cups blackberries, fresh or frozen (with summer coming on, use FRESH if you can)
- 1 3/4 cups beef broth or demiglasse
- 2 tablespoons cognac
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup
- 4 large duck breasts (or as many as you want)
- Prosciutto to wrap breasts
- Very finely ground fresh coffee or espresso
- Toothpicks

Sauce:

Melt 2 tablespoons butter in heavy large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat.

Add sugar; stir until sugar dissolves and mixture turns deep amber color, about 5 minutes (DON'T overcook)

Add wine, orange juice and vinegar (mixture will bubble vigorously) and bring to boil, stirring to dissolve caramel.

Add 1 1/4 cups berries and broth and boil until sauce thickens and is reduced to about 1 cup, stirring occasionally, about 25 minutes.

Strain sauce through sieve into heavy small saucepan, pressing on berries with back of spoon.

Mix in cognac and maple syrup.

Set sauce aside. (Can be prepared a day ahead. Cover and chill).

Duck:

Lightly salt and pepper each breast.

Wrap each Duck breast in one layer of prosciutto (or bacon); skewer to hold prosciutto on with toothpick.

Grind coffee or espresso grounds to almost flour like consistency; lightly dredge each prosciutto wrapped breast in coffee.

Grill breast to medium rare over medium hot coals or gas grill. Be sure to let rest 10 minutes.

Carve each breast for individual servings and drizzle blackberry sauce over duck. Serve extra sauce on side.