

MIGRATORY BIRD JOINT VENTURES: 1987-2012 CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS

By Jill Shirley, Central Valley Joint Venture Communications Coordinator



"Dennis Campini, center, accepts conservation award from Rep. Dennis Cardoza, right, while Glenn Olson of the Audubon Society stands by"

"Joint venture" is a term most commonly used to describe a cooperative business enterprise. However, wildlife conservationists adopted the term in the late 1980s to describe the public-private partnerships that would be needed to implement waterfowl conservation across the continent with the signing of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) in 1986.

Today, Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, or "JVs," are collaborative, regional partnerships that conserve habitat for priority bird species within specific geographic areas in the United States, Mexico and Canada. JVs share a vision of a landscape where native birds thrive, and believe that human well-being depends on healthy lands, waters, and wildlife. By bringing together diverse partners, joint ventures protect the landscapes that birds, and people, rely on for survival. The Grassland Water District (GWD) and Grassland Resource Conservation District (GRCD) have been enthusiastic partners of this uniquely successful effort from the beginning.

This year, Joint Ventures celebrate 25 years of bird habitat conservation.

Because of the Central Valley's importance to waterfowl, the Central Valley Habitat Joint

Venture (since renamed the Central Valley Joint Venture) became one of the first six JV's in North America. There are now twenty-two habitat, and three species, joint ventures across the continent.

One of the great achievements of the Central Valley Joint Venture (CVJV) has been in the area of water. The first CVJV Management Board, together with GWD and the GRCD Board, worked tirelessly behind the scenes in Sacramento, and Washington DC, to ensure that private duck clubs of the GRCD and existing public refuges would receive enough water of sufficient quality and quantity for optimum management of their wetlands. Their efforts culminated in the Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA). Signed in 1992, the CVPIA was a monumental piece of legislation that included language that carved out firm water supplies for federal refuges, state wildlife areas, and private wetlands within the GRCD. The current CVJV Management Board - in cooperation with the GRCD, GWD and other partners - utilizes the guarantees provided for in the CVPIA to advocate for wetland water supplies to Central Valley wetlands to this day.

The commitment of private landowners has been essential to the success of California Joint Ventures; over two-thirds of the remaining wetlands here are privately-owned and managed. All of the North American Joint Ventures recognize the importance of the wetlands within the Grasslands and at this year's 25th anniversary celebration in Washington D.C., bestowed the North American Migratory Bird Joint Venture Conservation Champions award to the private landowners within the GRCD. Representative Dennis Cardoza was

on hand to present the award to Dennis Campini who accepted on behalf of his fellow landowners.

Effective, collaborative conservation for birds is needed now more than ever due to habitat loss on breeding areas, overwintering grounds, and migration sites throughout North America. However, the good news is that the JV approach is working. Today, many waterfowl populations are at, or above, NAWMP goals. The work of the JVs has been critical in protecting and restoring habitats and populations of North America's birds through partnerships guided by sound science and effective management.

Joint Ventures have been widely accepted as the model for conservation in the 21st century. This is not surprising. For 25 years we have been proving that collaborative partnerships pursuing a shared vision work. For more information about the Central Valley Joint Venture go to <http://www.centralvalleyjointventure.org/>

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RIC ORTEGA BIOGRAPHY

Born and raised in Dos Palos, California Ric grew an affinity to the outdoors and hunting from an early age. Ric's love for wildlife led him abroad where he worked with wildlife veterinarians before graduating from Dos Palos High School. Ric went on to study Animal Science, Ecology and Systematic Biology at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. Following graduation, Ric conducted research in Restoration Ecology and Wildlife Management. He began working for the Department of Fish and Game overseeing hunting and fishing programs on the Central Coast before taking a position at the Los Banos Wildlife Area.

Ric first came to the Grassland Water District as an Environmental Scientist in 2005 investigating wetland responses to adaptive salinity drainage management. This research ultimately led to his graduate work at UC Davis and collaborative investigations between the District, the Department of Fish and Game, Department of Water Resources, Lawrence Berkeley National Lab, and the Bureau of Reclamation. These investigations helped exhibit the sensitivity of seasonal wetland productivity and the dangers associated with proposed changes from established best management practices. Ric was instrumental in the development of the District's Real-Time Water Quality Monitoring Network, which now credits tens of thousands of acre feet back to the Grasslands and is helping to meet water quality objectives in the San Joaquin River. Under the direction of Dave Widell, Ric served as Science and Water Quality Programs Manager focusing on wetland water policy and governmental affairs. Dave and Ric helped establish a great working relationship with neighboring agricultural districts and the implementation of the first Wetland/Agricultural water development

program. Ric was officially appointed to General Manager of Grassland Water District on January 10, 2012 after serving as Interim Manager following the sudden passing of Dave Widell in late August of 2011.

On behalf of the District's Board of Directors, Vice-President Doug Federighi said, "Our Board and the District's partners, though universally saddened by the untimely passing of Dave Widell, are united in the feeling that Ric Ortega is wonderfully suited, both from an educational and experience perspective, but most importantly from his evident deep commitment to the important role the Grassland Water District plays in the complex but rewarding conservation environment in which we all are deeply involved. I think we all recognized that Ric was uniquely qualified, on a number of levels, to assume the role as General Manager of our District, and we are thrilled to have his leadership as we move forward to meet the challenges ahead."

"It is an honor to follow in the steps of the legacy of dedicated managers who have fought to preserve this vital public trust", Ortega said. "We live in a time of restricted Delta exports, increasing environmental regulatory compliance and growing competition for limited water supplies between agriculture, municipal, and other environmental interests. This is one of the most important areas for waterfowl on earth and the board and I are devoted to its continued protection and the development of a reliable water supply."

(From right to left)

Reclamation Mid-Pacific Regional Director, Donald Glaser, Mid-Pacific Regional Resource Manager, Richard Woodley, Grassland Water District General Manager, Ric Ortega



Photo by Gary Zahm

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS LOOK TO PARTNER WITH WETLAND OWNERS TO SAFEGUARD VULNERABLE CALIFORNIA BIRDS

In an effort to safeguard California's most vulnerable birds, this summer the Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership is reaching out to wetland owners and managers to improve breeding success for rare Tricolored Blackbirds and create habitat for migratory shorebirds. The Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership includes Audubon California, PRBO Conservation Science, and The Nature Conservancy. The group is interested in working with you to maximize the value of wetlands for the greatest number of species. All of the practices are voluntary and non-regulatory.

Designated as a site of international importance for shorebirds by the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network and an Important Bird Area by Audubon California, "the value of the Grasslands region for shorebirds and Tricolored Blackbirds cannot be overstated," explains Catherine Hickey, Conservation Director at PRBO Conservation Science.

California's migratory birds are a vital part of the state's natural identity. Each year, millions of ducks and hundreds of thousands of shorebirds stop in California's Central

Valley as they travel along the Pacific Flyway – a superhighway for birds migrating between Alaska and Patagonia – making California one of the most important areas for migratory birds on the west coast of North America. Even though California continues to be a haven for migratory birds, the state has seen a steep decline in habitat over the past 150 years. Less than 10% of the state's original wetland habitat remains today, and the threat of losing more persists.

With the loss of native habitat, birds have become dependent on private lands including wetlands and agricultural fields with many of the largest colonies of Tricolored Blackbirds, waterbirds, and waterfowl nesting in wetland cattails. Over the last three years, the Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership has been working with the agricultural community, duck clubs, government agencies, other conservation groups, and the University of California to identify and test new practices that enhance the habitat value of private lands. "In many cases, making small adjustments to how land and crops are managed can dramatically help birds", says Monica Iglecia, Shorebird Conservation Biologist with Audubon California.

"Private land is critical to the preservation of species and the new frontier for conservation," says Keiller Kyle, Bird Conservation Project Manager at Audubon California. "We had over 200 farmers sign-up to work with us on our different initiatives targeting migratory birds and we hope to have the same success with local wetlands."

For more information about how to create habitat for shorebirds and tricolored blackbirds, please contact Keiller Kyle (kkyle@audubon.org) or Khara Strum (kstrum@prbo.org). More information is available at <http://www.camigratorybirds.org/>.

To identify the birds on your property, visit <http://ca.audubon.org/helping-migratory-birds>. If you'd like a bird identification handout from the Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership, please call Monica Iglecia at 916-649-7600 ext 115.



A pair of American Avocets. Photo by Dan Skalos

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM IN THE GRASSLANDS

In the 1970s, the protection of wetlands emerged as a critical issue for the United States Department of Agriculture with ASCS (renamed the Farm Service Agency) and SCS (renamed the Natural Resources Conservation Service) involvement through the Water Bank Program (WBP) which provided financial incentives to landowners to protect and manage wetland habitat. Several properties within the Grasslands Ecological Area were enrolled in the program, with up to 24,000 acres enrolled in the 90's. The WBP was not reauthorized or funded in the 1996 Farm Bill so WBP contracts existing at that time were not able to re-enroll in the program after their contracts expired.

The 1985 Farm Bill introduced the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), intended to retire highly erodible land from the production of agricultural crops for up

to 10 years, restore important habitats and manage them for wildlife. CRP's main focus was to retire marginal cropland and return it to its native habitat, with a huge focus on restoring the prairie pothole and native grass prairie regions of the Midwest. When it became apparent that Water Bank wasn't going to be funded in the 1996 Farm Bill, Dave Widell visited with NRCS Biologists in Washington D.C. and was able to convey the importance of managing these wetlands in California for wintering waterfowl in the Pacific Flyway, as well as supporting resident nesting waterfowl with brood habitat.

CRP was the only program within the farm bill that provided a long term annual payment for the maintenance of wildlife habitat, so special provisions were written into the CRP policy language to provide eligibility for Water Bank lands through the Continuous Sign-up.

CRP has two sign-ups; a general sign-up and a continuous sign-up. The provisions providing eligibility under the Continuous Sign-up for Water Bank properties were:

- 1) Marginal pastureland (in addition to cropland) would now be eligible and,
- 2) Water Bank Program participants in the last year of their contract would be eligible to enroll in CRP

Several properties that were in the WBP did sign up for CRP and at one time Merced County had over 22,000 acres in the program. CRP offers very specific practices that must be implemented in order to receive annual payments. CP-10, Establishment of Permanent Vegetation and CP-23, Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife were the two practices that WBP properties enrolled in CRP. The existing CRP successfully established the vegetative cover on adjacent lands and restored

Continued on page 5

STATE LEGISLATIVE UPDATE (AS PROVIDED BY CALIFORNIA WATERFOWL ASSN.)

SB 1249 (Wolk) – SUPPORT

CWA sponsored bill that would: 1) designate hunting and fishing as priority uses of DFG lands; 2) require that all non-hunting and fishing users of DFG lands pay an access fee through the Automated License Data System (ALDS) to support land management activities; and 3) require that all expenditures of County F&G Propagation Fund monies be first publicly reviewed and approved by the County or its local F&G Advisory Committee.

Status: Assembly Appropriations Committee

SB 1107 (Berryhill) – SUPPORT

CWA sponsored bill that would allow hunting and fishing nonprofit conservation groups to promote public awareness of their conservation work on DFG's Automated License Data System, including links to their webpage.

Status: Assembly Appropriations Committee

AB 1162 (Chesbro) – SUPPORT

CWA and California Outdoor Heritage Alliance (COHA) - sponsored bill to increase penalties for serious poaching violations.

Status: Senate Appropriations Committee

SB 250 (Rubio) – OPPOSE

Bill would create arbitrary deadlines for the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP), likely impacting an ongoing waterfowl habitat effects analysis.

Status: Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee

SB 1221 (Lieu) – OPPOSE

Bill would ban the use of dogs for hunting bears and bobcats. SB 1221 would effectively remove the F&G Commission's authority to regulate method of take for bear and bobcat hunting, and also reduce funding for warden activities.

Status: Assembly Appropriations Committee

SB 1288 (Harman) – SUPPORT

Bill would allow for reduced fee hunting licenses for wounded active duty military personnel (i.e. "Wounded Warriors").

Status: Assembly Appropriations Committee

SB 1480 (Corbett) – OPPOSE

Bill would criminalize certain trapping practices, including those used to control muskrat and beaver populations in managed wetlands, while also making various fee and other changes to the trapping license system.

Status: Assembly Appropriations Committee

AB 2179 (Allen) – OPPOSE

Bill would allow for fines of up to \$20,000 and hunting license revocation for any F&G violation through a revised civil penalty process.

Status: Senate Appropriations Committee

CALIFORNIA WATERFOWL ASSN. WELCOMES MARK HENNELLY AS NEW VICE PRESIDENT OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC POLICY

The California Waterfowl family is excited to welcome Mark Hennelly as the new Vice President of Legislative Affairs and Public Policy. Hennelly is leaving his position as Vice President of California Outdoor Heritage Alliance (COHA) where he spent the last six years promoting wildlife conservation and the preservation of our outdoor heritage. From 2000 to 2006, Hennelly also worked for California Waterfowl as the Deputy Director of Government Affairs.

"I am very excited that Mark is joining our team here at California Waterfowl," commented John Carlson, Jr., President. "His legislative and public policy experience will enhance our capabilities to carry out our mission: the conservation, protection, and enhancement of California's waterfowl resources, wetlands, and associated hunting heritage." Hennelly will serve as California Waterfowl's lead staff member dealing with legislative and public policy challenges and opportunities that affect both conservation and hunting.

Over the past several years, Hennelly has helped write and pass state legislation to protect conservation easements on private

land, encourage private landowners to open their properties to hunting and other wildlife-dependent recreational activities, and ensure that state waterfowl-dedicated monies are used as effectively and efficiently as possible on state-managed wetland areas. He has also helped defeat bills that would have banned dove hunting, prohibited the use of dogs for certain types of hunting, and raised fees on sporting ammunition. On the local level, he has worked to defeat county ordinances that would have restricted the ability of landowners to restore wildlife habitat on their lands. Mark has also helped stop several proposed local ordinances that would have effectively restricted or banned hunting on public lands and waters.

"I'm thrilled to be advocating directly for an organization that is so dedicated to waterfowl and waterfowl hunters," stated Hennelly. "There are a lot of political challenges facing the waterfowl conservation community—maintaining wetland water supplies, enhancing hunting opportunities on public lands, protecting waterfowl habitat from urban growth, ensuring appropriate waterfowl hunting regulations, amongst other issues—that I look forward to helping to address as part of the California Waterfowl team."

Hennelly will serve as California Waterfowl's lead staff member dealing with legislative and public policy challenges and opportunities that



affect both conservation and hunting.

Hennelly received a degree in political science from Santa Clara University

and earned his Master's in Government from California State University, Sacramento. Hennelly's resume also includes positions with the State Assembly on Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee as an Associate Consultant, and the Department of Fish and Game as a Scientific Aide. His impressive resume and longtime commitment to conservation and our hunting heritage has California Waterfowl staff and members excited about Hennelly's next chapter with the organization.

(Article first appeared in California Waterfowl Spring 2012)

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

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or maintained shallow water areas as seasonal wetlands providing both wintering and/or brood habitat where appropriate.

Over the next two years, most of the CRP contracts covering properties in the Grasslands will expire. Current regulation has eliminated practice CP-10 and practice CP-23 is only being offered for land meeting the definition of cropland (Grasslands properties only qualify as marginal pastureland).

So what options do CRP properties with expiring contracts have? Under the continuous “non-competitive” sign-up, CRP properties may offer marginal pastureland under practice CP-22 - Riparian Buffer, CP-29 - Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer or CP-30 - Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer. All buffers are limited in width and must be immediately adjacent and parallel to one of the following; a perennial stream, a seasonal stream, or a permanent water body such as a lake or pond that provides at least a seasonal flow of surface water from the water body off of the farm (property). These changes in eligible practices will have a very significant impact to properties who may be interested in re-enrolling in the continuous CRP.

For example, let's assume a 100-acre property currently enrolled in CRP and expiring soon is interested in re-enrolling in the program. Approximately 500 feet of Los Banos Creek runs through the property which meets the eligibility for CP-30 – Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer. Under the new provisions for buffer strips and within this scenario, only 50 feet on either side of Los Banos Creek are eligible for CRP. Payments are based on acres eligible for the program multiplied by an annual rental rate for non irrigated cropland.

	Existing CRP Contract	Re-enrolled CRP Contract
Eligible Acres	100	1.14 (500 x 100 ft)
Payment Rate	\$22/acre	\$67/acre
Annual Payment	\$2,200	\$64.98/year
Contract Length	10 years	10 years
Total Contract Payments	\$22,000	\$649.80

As you can see, eligible acres for re-enrollment in CRP are reduced from 100 acres to 1.14 acres which results in a much lower payment.

Participants currently enrolled in the CRP who are nearing the end of their contracts may offer eligible land for riparian, wildlife habitat or wetland buffers at any time. Interested parties may contact the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) office by calling (209) 722-4119, extension 2 for more information.

Guest Editorial

PRESERVING TRADITION

By Dale Boust, Owner-Member, Sand Lake Duck Club

As we approach another waterfowl season, my hope is that all of you experience success in the quantity of the limits you take home and the quality of experiences that will stay with you always.

My 2011-2012 season was memorable. Connecting with friends and family, and continuing to share the hunting traditions was as important as the birds I brought home. I do however, want to comment on a few disturbing hunting practices that are becoming more evident as time goes by.

When many of us began hunting, forty or fifty (or more) years ago, we were introduced to the sport by a father, grandfather, uncle, or another experienced mentor. We were taught, without compromise, “the rules of the game.” The acts of early shooting, taking over-limits, and overhunting were not even worthy of discussion in this gentleman’s sport. It was simple, if you broke the rules, you were not invited again.

Today, we have either hunters of a different ethic, or hunters that started to hunt later in life and completely missed the early guidance. This kind of hunter seems, disturbingly, to be growing in number. We hear shooting today 10, 15, and even 20 minutes before the legal, published and posted shooting time. We hear of hunters taking their seven sprig, regardless of species limits. We also are dismayed to hear private clubs shooting seven days a week.

Early shooting and over-limits are just plain illegal. The early shooting affects clubs all around the offending club, sending birds off the ponds well before legal shooting time.

Hunting pressure is a subject that is being discussed more and more as the attention to established laws and traditional hunting etiquette wanes. I agree that legally, in our area, there are about 100 shooting days in the season. I understand that some hunters find it difficult to hunt on the traditional Wednesday, Saturday and Sundays. Even the refuges realize that over-hunting affects quality and limits hunting to those same three days. Studies have shown that seven days a week hunting actually decreases the quantity and quality of available birds.

If a club’s choice to hunt seven days a week only had an effect on that club it wouldn’t be an issue. However, an over-hunted club affects the hunting within, at least, a mile radius of the over-hunted area. What results is a minority affecting the hunting of the majority.

These are the issues as I see them. The first two, early hunting and over-limits should be simple to solve. They are illegal. Cooperation is needed with the Fish and Game to turn in the offending parties. They are breaking the law.

Now we come to the sensitive issue of “hunting pressure.” Since, in this case, laws are not being broken, short of legislation, we are back to peer pressure as a solution.

We all have a significant investment in our hunting properties. Private memberships range from approximately \$50,000 to \$200,000 to hunt waterfowl for three months out of the year. All of these club owners are or were very successful in their business careers. We need to come together and use the talents that created our success to persuade the over-hunters that their actions are detrimental to our hunting tradition.

Let’s get back to the gentleman’s traditions on which our sport was founded. Let’s respect the game laws and respect the rights of our neighbors. If we can solve our problems ourselves, we can keep our ever encroaching legislative measures from further limitations on our hunting rights.

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DU RECEIVES FUNDING FOR FOURTH PHASE OF NORTHERN TULARE/SAN JOAQUIN BASINS NAWCA GRANT

In partnership with the California Department of Fish and Game and Wildlife Conservation Board, Grassland Water District (District), private landowners, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and funding from a recently approved North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant, Ducks Unlimited is preparing to begin wetland restoration and enhancement efforts on over 5,200 acres of critical wetland habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife in the Northern Tulare and San Joaquin Basins of California's Central Valley. This area has already lost more than 95% of its historic wetlands, so this work is vital to DU's mission as the Central Valley supports up to 60% of wintering Pacific Flyway waterfowl. Our partners share this passion for waterfowl and wetlands conservation and have contributed approximately \$2.2 million of non-Federal funds to match the \$1 million NAWCA grant.

Grant and matching funds will deliver conservation work on 6 public wildlife areas, one privately owned duck club, and improve water deliveries to 1,763 acres of private wetland habitats served by the District.

Wetland conservation objectives for this grant include restoration and enhancement of seasonal and semi-permanent wetlands while conserving water in a region that has fierce competition for limited water supplies. Typical project activities will involve earthmoving to restore wetland topography and diversity and improve water conveyance and wetland management capabilities, thus benefitting habitat conditions for waterfowl and other wetland wildlife. More efficient and longer lasting water control structures will be installed on projects to provide wetland depth control and improve water conveyance between wetland units. Installation of new lift pump facility will provide increased water flows to wetlands, while enabling flexibility in flow rates based on available water supplies. In addition, a 7-mile stretch of San Luis Canal, which serves thousands of acres of wetlands on the east side of the north Grasslands, will be restored. Accumulated sediment will be excavated from the center of the canal and used to rebuild the interior side slopes, which will then be replanted with native vegetation such as sedges, rushes, and grass species. This

will increase water delivery flows to thousands of wetland acres, improve habitat management capabilities, and is expected to reduce long-term maintenance costs for the District.

In addition to the waterfowl benefits targeted with this large-scale wetland conservation effort, these projects will also benefit a myriad of other wildlife, including shorebirds, wading birds, songbirds, raptors, reptiles, and amphibians. Outdoor enthusiasts will enjoy excellent public recreation opportunities on all six California Wildlife Areas, including fishing, wildlife viewing/photography, and excellent waterfowl hunting during the season. Ducks Unlimited feels very fortunate to work closely with a diverse group of partners to develop and conserve valuable water resources and wetland habitat for Central Valley waterfowl and other wildlife species.

