

## GRASSLAND FUND 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION FUNDRAISER AND LANDOWNER MEETING

On May 18, 2013 landowners, partners, and community members gathered at the Los Banos Community Center for the Grassland Fund 20th Anniversary Celebration. The event began with gaming, raffles, and authentic Italian cuisine by De Angelo's of Merced. For some, it was their first opportunity to learn more about the Grassland Fund and its role in conserving the remaining wetlands and the hunting legacy here in the Grasslands.

Pepper Snyder, President of the GWD Board of Directors, gave a warm welcome to patrons emphasizing the importance of the Fund to the community and to the Grasslands. Ric Ortega, GWD General Manager, presented on future water supply challenges, projects in the works, and the importance of the Fund to the Grassland Environmental Education Center (GEECe). Of special interest to landowners, California Waterfowl Association biologist, Rich Wright presented last season's harvest results and Grassland Resource Conservation District board member Dale Boust introduced the new Grassland Fund Heritage Program.

The highlight of the program was the presentation of the J. Martin Winton Conservationist of the Year Award by GRCD President Dennis Campini to Allan Inman, Manager/ Entomologist of the Merced County Mosquito Abatement District. President Campini presented the award to Mr. Inman with this statement, "The J. Martin Winton Conservationist of the Year Award was conceived over two decades ago by the Grassland Resource Conservation District to honor individuals that have exhibited 'Outstanding Achievement in Natural Resource Conservation'. This year's recipient over the years has done just that. Allan Inman understands that wetland management in the Grasslands has been refined over the years and its success is contingent on optimal drawdown, irrigation, and flood up timing. As a willing and informative participant on the Grassland Habitat Management Coordination

Committee, he has always demonstrated excellent cooperation in achieving both resource and public health objectives. Working cooperatively with partners in the Grasslands, he was instrumental in acquiring funding for implementing best management practices for mosquito abatement during the onset of West Nile Virus. In the face of unsustainable regulatory momentum in this state, we are very fortunate in Merced County to have an individual at the helm who appreciates the criticality of our wetlands."

The evening quickly changed gears with the onset of the live auction where folks had an opportunity to acquire vacation packages, limited edition art work, and plenty of guns and ammo. The celebration continued with more gaming, raffles, and cocktails followed by a cohort of dancing duck hunters to live music.

Grassland Water District, Grassland Resource Conservation District, and the Grassland Fund would like to thank all guests, donors, and volunteers for their hard work and contributions that made our event a huge success. We look forward to seeing you next year on the dance floor!



Allan Inman,  
2012 J. Martin Winton  
Conservationist of the Year

## GRASSLANDS HISTORY

The following information is drawn from *The Fall and Rise of the Wetlands of California's Great Central Valley* (University of California Press, 2011) by Philip Garone, available for purchase at the Grassland Water District Office.

In the 1870's, Miller & Lux started flooding lands in the fall to irrigate winter grasses for their cattle. Flooding the lands also attracted migratory waterfowl from the north. Around 1925, cattle interests and duck clubs purchased lands from the firm of Miller & Lux Co., though the company retained the majority of the riparian and appropriative water rights for these lands. The US Bureau of Reclamation's Central Valley Project also needed water rights along the San Joaquin River, most of which were held by Miller & Lux. On July 27, 1939 Miller & Lux entered into two contracts; the first was a purchase contract with the Bureau that covered overflow water rights to over a quarter of a million acres,

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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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**SAVE THE DATE!!!**

The California Waterfowl Association 27th Annual Los Banos Banquet will be Friday, October 25, 2013. Tickets are \$45.00/person available at the Grassland Water District Office or on the CWA website, [www.calwaterfowl.org](http://www.calwaterfowl.org). Do not miss the Early Bird Special, purchase your raffle tickets by October 2 and receive Extra General and Double Progressive Tickets. \$100, \$300, \$500 & \$1,000 packs available. Hope to see you there!

**2012-2013 WATERFOWL HARVEST SUMMARY FOR PRIVATE DUCK CLUBS IN THE NORTH AND SOUTH GRASSLAND**

**Number of Clubs Reporting**

Years	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
North Grasslands	19	24	22	24	23
South Grasslands	18	27	23	22	23
<b>Totals</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>46</b>

**Average Number of Waterfowl shot per Hunter Day (7 bird limit, 100 day season) At Private Duck Clubs in the North and South Grasslands**

Years	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
North Grasslands	4.65	4.49	4.78	4.82	4.51
South Grasslands	4.07	3.5	4.09	4.41	3.96
<b>Range</b>	<b>2.06-6.37</b>	<b>2.05-6.29</b>	<b>2.31-6.60</b>	<b>1.22-6.92</b>	<b>1.14-6.29</b>

**Average Number of Waterfowl shot per Hunter Day (7 bird limit, 100 day season) At Public and Private Hunting Areas**

Years	2011-12	2012-13	Change from 11-12
North Grasslands	4.82	4.51	-0.31
South Grasslands	4.41	3.96	-0.45
N. Freitas	2.52	2.45	-0.07
S. Freitas	1.68	1.53	-0.15
Gadwall	3.57	2.63	-0.94
Merced	2.83	2.48	-0.35
Mendota	2.49	2.18	-0.31
Volta	2.70	2.31	-0.39
San Luis	2.28	1.96	-0.32
W. Bear Creek	2.74	1.95	-0.79
Salt Slough	2.15	1.84	-0.31
Los Banos	2.13	1.90	-0.23
Kesterson	2.00	1.76	-0.24
China Island	2.04	1.69	-0.35



## GRASSLANDS CLUBS HOST WOUNDED VETERANS

The Gustine Gun Club & the Hollister Gun Club had the privilege of hosting a Wounded Veterans' Shoot at their clubs this year. The Gustine Club hosted 10 veterans on the Dec. 20th and the Hollister Gun Club hosted 5 veterans on the Jan. 5th. All of the veterans were from the Camp Pendleton area. From all reports, it was the quintessential win-win experience for everyone.

The initial coordination of the event was undertaken by Jeff Smith of California Waterfowl Association. He contacted Mike Corker, Gustine Gun Club and Bart Bates, Hollister Gun Club, both of whom readily undertook the task of arranging a date, hosts/guides, food and all other necessities for the veterans.

The five hour drive from Camp Pendleton got them to the clubs late for an "attitude adjustment" hour, but a sumptuous meal was waiting. After the draw for blinds, the veterans retired to their respective host's quarters for the night and were "serenaded" by tattoo & taps at the appropriate times.

Shooting the next morning was "dang good", with almost all limiting out. Following the hunt-lunch was served and there was a picture taking session.

All of the veterans were in agreement that they had one hell of a time and want to come back next year. Judging by the reaction to the veterans by all the Hollister Gun Club members, it

will be a done deal. If you or your club would like to get more information on sponsoring a Wounded Veterans' Shoot, contact Bart Bates, Hollister Gun Club at 510-262-0109 or Jeff Smith, CWA at 916-648-1406.



Front row (L to R)  
CPO Justin Wilson, Staff Sgt Tim Davis, MSgt Joe Lurz, Capt Matt Lampert,  
Mgt Zach Peters, Mike Sullivan (Host)  
Back Row (L to R)  
Mike McCabe (Host), Dennis Hatfield (Host), Bill Tinsley (Host), Sparkey Johnston (Host).

## GRASSLAND FUND HERITAGE PROGRAM

The Grassland Fund Heritage Program was designed to augment the Grassland Fund and offer businesses, organizations, clubs and individuals a conduit to a higher level of financial support to aid our common goal of a stable, reliable water supply for the Grasslands. The increased costs to address the many existing and new challenges in protecting and procuring our water supplies have resulted in the need for an avenue to an increased level of donor financial commitment. In addition, the Grassland Fund Heritage Program provides funding to our educational outreach program, the Grassland Environmental Education Center. GEECe has become a popular field trip destination for Central Valley schools and reaches students through classroom presentations by the GEECe Education Coordinator.

The Program will involve a five year minimum donor commitment at one of four levels.

### Platinum Level:

\$3000.00 per year for five years

### Gold Level:

\$2000.00 per year for five years

### Silver Level:

\$1000.00 per year for five years

### Bronze Level:

\$250.00 per year for five years

The donors will receive the following:

For Platinum, Gold and Silver Levels

1. An engraved donation plaque suitable for wall or desk display.
2. Name engraved on a permanent plaque displayed in the Grasslands office.
3. Listing in the District newsletter with all other donors.

For Bronze Level:

1. Certificate of Appreciation

2. Listing in the District newsletter with all other donors.

The Grassland Fund would also like to acknowledge all the clubs and individuals that have faithfully donated to the Fund over the past four years. Those amounts will be added to your present donations to determine the donation level. All donations are greatly appreciated by the Grassland Fund.

To request a Grassland Fund Heritage Program donation commitment form or more information on the contact the Grassland Water District office at 209-826-5188.

*The Grassland Fund is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to conservation, education, and the legal defense of the Grassland Wetlands of Merced County. All donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.*

## LOS BANOS WA SET FOR GREEN POWER THROUGH CWA AWARDED STATE FUNDS

Los Banos Wildlife Area, the oldest wildlife area in the state of California, was recently the beneficiary of a California Waterfowl Association awarded grant to install a solar panel array to provide green power for low lift pumps on the area. The grant, provided by Wildlife Conservation Board, totals close to one million dollars and was awarded to the CWA to implement the planned project. The state grant is the largest ever awarded to CWA in

Merced County. The project is a first of its kind in Merced County and will include PG&E as a project partner for green power. Installation of the solar field will occur in the summer of 2013 and other smaller project components will be wrapped up in early 2014. The project will allow the wildlife area to use a clean source of energy, continue to use pumps to reuse or recirculate water for water savings and lastly will save on annual power costs.

California Waterfowl frequently participates in wetland projects throughout the grasslands and Merced County. If any clubs are interested in participating, please call 916.275.1020.

## GRASSLANDS HISTORY CONTINUED...

including the Grasslands. The second, a contract with the Bureau to provide substitute water for crops, promised flows from the new reservoir being constructed at Friant. Miller & Lux agreed to provide free water to the Grasslands until September 1944, when water flows to the San Joaquin River would be stopped by the Friant Dam completion. Faced with loss of water supply, duck clubs and cattlemen formed the Grass Lands Association in 1939. Through the 1940's, all negotiations and lawsuits to secure a water supply for the Grasslands failed. The Grasslands realized that they had to elevate their concerns to Washington, D.C. In April 1951, the first of three congressional hearings were held. Among those testifying for the Grasslands were Earl Harris, Santa Cruz Land & Cattle and J. Martin Winton, Hollister Land & Cattle Co. In March 1952, bills were introduced to the House of Representatives in an effort to supply water to state waterfowl management areas and national wildlife refuges in the lower San Joaquin Valley, but the bills failed to protect the Grasslands. During the hearing in June, 1952, J. Martin Winton re-emphasized the Grasslands landowners' contributions to the preservation of waterfowl and shorebirds in the Pacific Flyway. Despite this effort, the

bill stalled. The Grass Lands Association was allowed to purchase only 20,000 acre-feet of water that fall, not nearly enough to flood the Grasslands. Because there was not enough wetland habitat in the Grasslands region to sustain them, hungry, migrating waterfowl were drawn to the rice fields instead and crop depredation was widespread. A state of emergency was declared by the Governor Earl Warren resulting in the Bureau agreeing to deliver an additional 6,000 acre-feet of water. It took several key groups including private landowners, state and federal refuges, rice growers, and cattlemen to provide the support needed to obtain a water supply for the Grasslands. In December, 1952 the Grassland Lands Association, a mutual water company, began the process to become a public water district in order to acquire the legal authority under the California Water Code to negotiate long-term contracts with the Bureau. Governor Warren called together

representatives from federal and state agencies to draft a revised bill for public and private lands. The result of that was the Grasslands Development Authorization Act. On December 22, 1953 the Grassland Water District, California's only district created for the preservation of waterfowl, was approved by the Merced County Board of Supervisors. On August 27, 1954 President Eisenhower signed the Grasslands Development Authorization Act into law and J. Martin Winton was given the pen President Eisenhower used to sign the bill.



J. Martin Winton

## GOOD THINGS HAPPEN AT GRASSLAND FUND FUNDRAISERS!

In October 2011, a beautiful friendship was formed when Dick Overstreet won a yellow Labrador retriever puppy out of Feather Ranch Kennels in the live auction. Buddy is now two years old and ready for his second waterfowl season as Dick's partner and favorite photo subject. His picture 'Marking the Retrieve' won first place in its class at the Merced County Spring Fair in Los Banos and is now on display at the Grassland Water District office. If you have a Grasslands picture you would like displayed in our office or included in our newsletter, please send to [jwright@gwdwater.org](mailto:jwright@gwdwater.org).



Left: "Marking the Retrieve" by Dick Overstreet  
Bottom: (L to R) Phil Mueller, Feather Ranch Kennels, Dick Overstreet and Buddy





# INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERS TOUR THE GRASSLANDS ECOLOGICAL AREA

Submitted by: Catherine Hickey, PRBO Conservation Science, [chickey@prbo.org](mailto:chickey@prbo.org)

The Grassland Ecological Area (GEA) is among the top five most important sites to shorebird populations in California and is designated as a site of International Importance by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN; [www.whsrn.org/](http://www.whsrn.org/)). In mid-November, members of the WHSRN Hemispheric Council (Catherine Hickey – US, and Fernando Castillo - Colombia), WHSRN staff (Diego Luna – Southern Cone Coordinator, and Eduardo Palacios – Northwest Mexico Coordinator), and US Forest Service International Programs (Jim Chu) visited the Grasslands to learn about conservation issues in the region. Ric Ortega and Shawn Carmo of the Grassland Water District graciously hosted the group, providing an overview of the area, information about water management and provision challenges, as well as challenges and opportunities for providing target levels of habitat for migratory bird species. The group toured the North and South Grasslands to visit sites with different habitat features and to get perspective of the size of the area and scale of management investment.

The group was joined by three PRBO Conservation Science ecologists, including Matt Reiter (Chair of the Migratory Shorebird Project, a multi-partner international research project to help guide shorebird conservation and connect communities across the Americas; [www.migratoryshorebirdproject.org/](http://www.migratoryshorebirdproject.org/)), Blake

Barbaree, and Cory Gregory to learn about shorebird research focused on elucidating the connectivity of wetland and agricultural complexes of the Central Valley and Klamath Basin to shorebirds. The “connectivity” project is being conducted as part of efforts by the Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership (PRBO, Audubon California, and The Nature Conservancy) to enhance, restore and protect migratory bird habitats in California, while applying the best available science to better understand habitat needs and conservation outcomes.

The WHSRN group’s visit to the Grassland Ecological Area was one stop on a tour of critical sites for shorebird populations in California. The group convened first in San Diego for a meeting of the Copper River Migratory Bird Initiative ([www.fs.fed.us/global/wings/birds/crimbi/welcome.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/global/wings/birds/crimbi/welcome.htm)) and visited San Diego Bay, a WHSRN Site of Regional Importance. They also visited Morro Bay (potential WHSRN Site of Regional Importance), Elkhorn Slough (WHSRN Site of Regional Importance), and Sacramento Valley

Wetlands and Ricelands (WHSRN Site of International Importance). The primary goals of the trip were to connect personnel from different sites to discuss management challenges and opportunities to protect migratory birds and their habitat, and to discuss potential collaboration opportunities for research, monitoring, conservation management, and outreach to communities at the sites.

Much thanks to the Grassland Water District for the informative tour and for working with federal, state, and the many private landowners and managers who work so hard to make the Grasslands one of the most important wetland sites in the Western Hemisphere!



Bottom (left to right): Blake Barbaree, Fernando Castillo, Catherine Hickey, Eduardo Palacios  
Top (left to right): Shawn Carmo, Ric Ortega, Matt Reiter, Diego Luna, Cory Gregory

## CDFW COMPLETES 2013 WATERFOWL BREEDING POPULATION SURVEY

JUNE 19, 2013

Media Contacts: Melanie Weaver, CDFW Wildlife Branch, (916) 445-3717 • Janice Mackey, CDFW Communications, (916) 322-8908

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has completed its 2013 waterfowl breeding population survey. The resulting data indicate the overall number of breeding ducks has decreased by 15 percent. “Habitat conditions are poor in both northeastern California and the Central Valley, so below-average production for all waterfowl species is not a surprise,” said CDFW waterfowl program biologist Melanie Weaver.

Mallards, the most abundant duck in the survey, decreased 23 percent, from 387,100 in 2012 to 298,600 this year. The total number of ducks of all species decreased from 529,700 last year to 451,300 this year. This estimate is 23 percent below the long-term average.

The decline was attributed to low precipitation, especially in the spring, with some areas only receiving 34 percent of average rainfall since Jan. 1. CDFW biologists and warden-pilots have conducted this survey using fixed-wing aircraft since 1955. The California Waterfowl Association, under contract with CDFW, assists CDFW by surveying some transects by helicopter. The population estimates are for surveyed areas only, although those areas include the majority of California’s suitable duck nesting habitat. They include wetland and agricultural areas in northeastern California, the Central Valley from Red Bluff to Bakersfield, and the Suisun Marsh.

The majority of California’s wintering duck population originates from breeding areas in Alaska and Canada that are surveyed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The results from these surveys should be available in July. CDFW survey information, along with similar data from other Pacific Flyway states, is used by the USFWS and the Flyway Council when setting hunting regulations for the Pacific Flyway states, including California. The federal regulation frameworks specify the outside dates, maximum season lengths and maximum bag limits. Once CDFW receives the USFWS estimates and the frameworks for waterfowl hunting regulations from the USFWS, CDFW will make a recommendation to the Fish and Game Commission regarding this year’s waterfowl hunting regulations

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