



Grassland Water District Statement on Full CVP Refuge Water Allocation

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LOS BANOS, CA – The Bureau of Reclamation has revised the Central Valley Project 2017 water allocation for refuge water supply contractors. Wildlife refuges served by the Grassland Water District, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service will receive a 100 percent Level 4 allocation, a very rare occurrence.

“For only the second time since the Central Valley Project Improvement Act was passed in 1992, most wildlife habitat areas in the Central Valley will receive a full water supply in time for the irrigation season,” said Grassland Water District’s General Manager Ric Ortega. Abundant rain and snowfall this year created a surplus that allowed Reclamation to acquire enough Refuge Level 4 surface water to meet legal commitments.

Delivery of a full water supply is critical for refuges to recover from the effects of drought, when the managed wetlands received less than half of their full supply. Insufficient water deliveries greatly reduced the footprint of wildlife habitat and diminished critical food resources to the millions of migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway.

Grassland Water District President, Pepper Snyder, noted that the Bureau of Reclamation and local water districts worked together to achieve this year’s full water allocation, and stressed the importance of year-round water deliveries to refuges. “Refuge water deliveries in the Central Valley require cooperation with other water users. The San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors have long supported Grassland Water District in meeting the habitat needs of San Joaquin Valley wildlife refuges. In addition to water volume, the timing of deliveries to refuges is critical. A full Level 4 supply allows us to develop habitat in the spring and summer that waterfowl need in the winter. Lack of water in the spring and summer caused the greatest impacts to refuges during the drought.”

Refuge contractors were the last to receive a full water allocation from the Central Valley Project this year. Reclamation’s allocation announcement came just in time for refuge managers to adjust management strategies for this irrigation season. Grassland Water District will be able to maximize spring and summer irrigations and habitat to support local breeding birds and species such as the Giant Garter Snake. In most years, federal and state funding is insufficient to acquire a full supply, leaving refuge managers to make difficult choices for natural resource management.

Mr. Ortega emphasized that long-term water solutions are still needed to achieve full Level 4 refuge allocations in normal and dry water years. “Meeting the water needs of refuges only in flood years is not enough. A sustained commitment of resources in conjunction with local agency partnerships and wise use of groundwater are essential if the Central Valley’s wetlands are to remain healthy and productive.”

Only five percent of California’s historic wetland landscape remains. The Grasslands Ecological Area in Merced County is one of North America’s most important wetland complexes. It is recognized as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and a shorebird reserve of global importance by the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network.

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