

Planning Update

San Joaquin National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update #3

The fall waterfowl migration is now in full swing. The air is filled with the sound of lesser and greater sandhill cranes, Aleutian Canada geese, cackling Canada geese, along with other waterfowl and shorebirds. Neo-tropical migrants have completed their migration through the Refuge for the season. The roost ponds are fully flooded for the winter and the Refuge staff is growing corn and winter wheat to help feed the many migrating birds.

Greetings!

This is the third in a series of updates from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to keep you informed about planning efforts for the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). We will be sending these planning updates regularly to landowners near the study area, government agencies, private organizations, and others who express interest.

This update presents a description of the work we've been doing on the plan and the planning process we are undertaking.

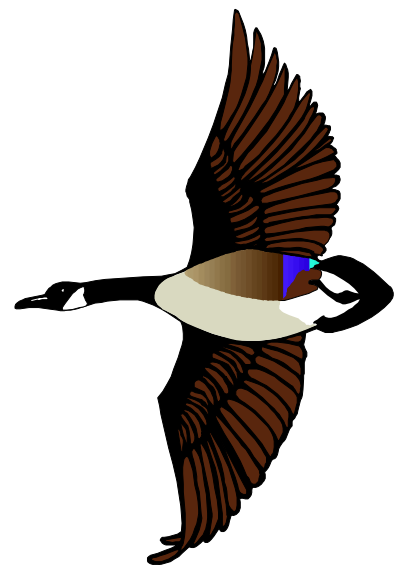
Where We Started

In 1997, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. The Act formulated a mission for the Refuge System, and states that all wildlife refuges must have a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) in place by the year 2013. These plans will provide a 15-year guide, using the best available scientific knowledge, to help managers achieve the purposes for which each refuge was established, and to work toward the mission of the Refuge System. The Act gives the Service guidance for managing refuges in a way that ensures the long-term conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. Maintenance of biological integrity and diversity along with facilitating compatible wildlife-dependent recreation in the refuge system are two of the important principles laid out in the Act.

What We've Been Doing

Since the last planning update, sent out in October 1999, the planning team has continued work on the comprehensive conservation plan for the San Joaquin River Refuge. The planning team has been meeting monthly to discuss various issues to be addressed in the plan. In addition, the Service has held three quarterly Community Forums at the Stanislaus County Agricultural Center in Modesto. We will describe the Community Forums later in this planning update.

In addition to reviewing and analyzing comments from within the Service, other agencies, and members of the public, we have been gathering information on the existing conditions at the Refuge. We have started writing the introduction, Refuge description, and resource analysis sections of the plan and environmental assessment. An inventory and analysis of the natural and cultural resources at the Refuge are still in progress.



Canada Goose - USFWS Staff

Community Forum

The Refuge hosts a Community Forum quarterly at the Stanislaus County Agricultural Center in Modesto. The forum is your opportunity to learn what's going on at the Refuge and our opportunity to hear how it affects you. At the last two meetings, we discussed several issues, including the US Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) implementation of the nonstructural flood protection alternative, water quality, agricultural drainage, and mosquito abatement. This is a summary of the issues and concerns that we have received.

Mosquito Abatement

The Turlock Mosquito Abatement District (TMAD), the East Side Mosquito Abatement District (ESMAD), are concerned that they will be unable to control mosquitoes produced on the Refuge the way they traditionally do. The Districts expressed their concern that people within their Districts may be exposed to mosquito-transmitted diseases. The Community of Grayson is concerned that mosquito levels will be higher than they have been should TMAD and ESMAD not be allowed to control mosquitoes in the traditional way on the Refuge. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) is currently being developed by the Service with ESMAD and TMAD and should be completed by April 2000. In response to a request from TMAD and ESMAD, the MOU and CCP will provide a written plan of refuge management activities.

Flood Control

Congressman Condit's representative stated that their number one priority is the adjacent landowners' desire to complete the nonstructural (NSA) flood control project with the Corps. The Service has acquired its portion of the property necessary to complete the project. Although no agreement for the nonstructural flood control project has been signed yet, the Corps has made some progress in being able to sign an agreement between the Corps and the Service.

Restoration

Concern was expressed about the restoration of the new Refuge addition. Sacramento River Partners, a nonprofit organization, has been hired by the Refuge to prepare a pre-restoration plan for the new Refuge lands west of the San Joaquin River. This plan has subsequently been sent to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service for review.

Water Level

At the July Community Forum, concern was expressed that water management on the new Refuge lands west of the San Joaquin River was causing a rise in the groundwater level. Adjacent landowners expressed concern that an elevated groundwater level would make the lands surrounding the Refuge more difficult to farm. Refuge staff informed those attending

the Community Forum that a letter had been sent to adjacent landowners requesting permission to establish observation wells on lands adjacent to the Refuge. These observation wells would monitor groundwater levels.

The fourth Community Forum will be held on 20 January 2000.

Where: Stanislaus County Agricultural Center, Modesto
3800 Cornucopia Way, near the intersection of
Crows Landing Road and Service Road, West
of Ceres.

Harvest Hall, Computer Room
(same room as the October Community Forum).
The phone number for the Agricultural Center is
(209) 525-6800.

When: 9:00 am

Date: Thursday, 20 January 2000

For More Information

We are available to provide any information that you may need regarding the Refuge and this planning process. Also, Service staff can attend a meeting of your organization to discuss the development of the San Joaquin River Refuge conservation plan. Please notify us at least three weeks in advance to avoid scheduling conflicts.

If you have questions, comments, concerns, or would like information about the Refuge, please feel free to call, e-mail, or write us:

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Please pass this planning update along to anyone you think might be interested in the planning process.

Please call or write to us to be placed on our mailing list or to report a change in your mailing address.

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Attention: Leslie Lew*