

The Central Valley (CV) of California is recognized in The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and Ducks Unlimited, Inc.'s (DU's) International Conservation Plan as one of the most important wintering areas for waterfowl in North America, annually supporting up to 60% of wintering waterfowl in the Pacific Flyway. It also supports 50% of spring migrating shorebirds in the Pacific Flyway. However, rapid urbanization, conversion of native lands for agricultural production, and increasing competition for water resources has resulted in the loss of >95% of California's original wetlands, and 98% of its riparian habitat. This proposal supports wetland conservation objectives of the CV Joint Venture (CVJV) to restore and enhance wetlands and associated habitats to support a diversity of migratory birds.

The majority of historical wetland loss in California centers on wetland complexes in the San Joaquin Basin (SJB) and Tulare Basin (TB) (fed by the San Joaquin and Kern Rivers, respectively), and wetland conservation efforts in these two watersheds are critical to maintaining the importance of the SJB and TB for waterbirds. The Grasslands Ecological Area (GEA) centered around Los Banos is a focal region within the SJB because it is the largest contiguous block of wetlands remaining in California. GEA has been recognized as a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention, Site of International Importance by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN), and an Audubon California Important Bird Area (IBA), as it annually supports millions of wetland-dependent birds. DU has developed and implemented landscape level conservation proposals that incorporate the region's wetland habitats and riparian corridors, their importance to Pacific Flyway waterfowl and other wetland-dependent wildlife, and their connection with previous habitat conservation efforts in the SJB and TB.

#### 2021 Projects within GEA

##### 1) Public Lands

- a. San Luis National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) – Blue Goose Unit – project focuses on improved water delivery and drainage within their managed wetland complex.
- b. San Luis NWR – East Bear Creek Unit – project focuses on improved water delivery, drainage, and re-contouring wetland basins within Channels 3, 4, 5, and Northwest Pasture.
- c. Merced NWR – project focuses on new water delivery system to Lone Tree Unit.
- d. North Grasslands Wildlife Area (WA) – Salt Slough Unit – completed 300-acre native grass restoration.

##### 2) Private Lands – focusing on improved water delivery, improved drainage, and constructing/improving levees within their managed wetland complex.

- a. Big Sandy Land and Cattle Company
- b. Tracy Duck Club
- c. Eureka Farms
- d. Reeves Lakes
- e. Wild Duck Farms
- f. Ward Farms
- g. Mesquite Sportsman Club

- h. Big Water Land Company
  - i. Gable Land and Cattle Company
- 3) Grant Updates
- a. California Duck Stamp (State): Approved to receive \$205,306 for a enhancement project at Merced NWR
  - b. NAWCA (Federal): \$3.789 Million recommended or approved for funding & submitted \$2 Million
  - c. Frito Lay (Foundation): \$360,000
  - d. Wildlife Conservation Board (State): Approved for funding \$1,372,616