Farmland (primarily ricelands), wildlife refuges, and the bypasses designed for flood protection can all be managed to work together for dynamic conservation and to mimic the historical floodplains in the Sacramento River Basin, while continuing to provide flood protection for cities, rural communities and landowners throughout the region. Spreading out and slowing down water across this landscape mimics natural flows and provides multiple benefits year-round by allowing farmers to cultivate rice and other crops for humans during the spring and summer, habitat for wild birds, reptiles, and other fauna in the fall, and food for migratory birds and native fish species in the winter. This novel, holistic water management strategy can bring our ecosystem to life through the careful interaction of water, sun and land. To visualize the opportunities for reactivating our floodplains, see the map on the back of the page.

Landowners throughout the Sacramento River Basin are committed to projects that will advance floodplain reactivation to improve habitat for fish and wildlife, while maintaining their farming and managed wetland operations. The historical floodplain has been divided by levees, yet there are actions that can be taken by landowners on both sides of the levees that will reactivate the historical floodplain:

- lands within the footprint of the current flood protection system—the Wet-Side of the levees; and
- fields outside the current flood protection system—the Dry-Side of the levees—that were part of the historical floodplain.

The combination of these different actions will mimic natural, shallow, long-duration flood patterns and restore the ecological process that drives healthy and productive aquatic ecosystems. Together, Wet-Side and Dry-Side water management strategies show tremendous promise for fish and wildlife populations on working lands.

Within the Flood Protection Footprint (Wet-Side of Levees)

Projects within the flood protection bypasses create managed seasonal wetland habitat on agricultural lands that include perimeter berms and water-control structures, increasing the duration of flood events and allowing the water residence time necessary for aquatic food web production. These projects will provide volitional passage for salmon to enter and exit the floodplain fields at will, providing access to
high food-density foraging opportunities, refuge from predators, and an unimpeded migration corridor to the Golden Gate. Inundation of the floodplain will occur during the late fall and winter months allowing for continued farming during the growing season. These projects will be operated in conjunction with new enhanced fish passage at various weirs to increase the frequency of floodplain activation and optimize adult fish passage through the bypasses. Wet Side projects have the potential to create about 20,000 acres of fish-accessible floodplain habitat.

Examples of these projects are Nigiri 2.0 and Dos Rios.

Outside the Flood Protection Footprint (Dry-Side of Levees)

Fish cannot access aquatic habitats beyond the Wet-Side of the levee, but managed aquatic habitats on farm fields and other managed wetlands (duck clubs and refuges) on the Dry-Side can still benefit fish through food production. Dry-Side projects reactivate historical floodplains by diverting water from the rivers to flood fields during the fall and winter. Holding water on these fields for several weeks produces abundant zooplankton and invertebrates (fish food). Fields are then periodically drained, transporting the food and water back to the river ecosystem supporting fish and wildlife. Dry Side projects have the potential to re-integrate several hundred thousand acres of historical floodplain food web production back into the Sacramento River Basin ecosystem where fish need food to be healthy.

Examples of these Fish Food projects are River Garden Farms, Montna Farms, RD 108, and RD 1500/Sutter Mutual Water Company.

To learn more about the coalition advancing these efforts, see Reactivating our Floodplains.