

## **Pacific Flyway Winter 2015/2016 Habitat**

December 11, 2015

Substantial progress has been made this fall to secure water supplies to provide Pacific Flyway habitat for birds this winter. Just over a month ago, water management entities, landowners and conservation partners were concerned that without considerable rainfall, there would be little to no water available to create Pacific Flyway habitat outside of small amounts of water for the Refuges and Wildlife Management Areas. Now, water managers, many working with the Bureau of Reclamation and the Department of Water Resources, have taken advantage of water conserved during the irrigation season and other supplies to provide substantial increases in Pacific Flyway habitat this fall and winter compared with last year. This will be augmented by the recent rainfall and the State Water Resources Control Board's lifting curtailments (including Term 91).

This increase in habitat is being accomplished throughout the Sacramento Valley, which is important because it will help to spread out the bird species using the Pacific Flyway, decreasing their susceptibility to outbreaks of avian diseases that occur when there are high concentrations of birds on habitat lands. The following are calculations of habitat increases that are occurring on rice lands and privately managed wetlands because of the recent water management actions.

### Sacramento River

The Sacramento River Settlement Contractors, working with the Bureau of Reclamation, were successful in securing water supplies to provide approximately 50,000 acres of additional habitat along the Sacramento River in Glenn, Colusa, Sutter, Yolo and Sacramento Counties. This water was available this winter because of conservation actions undertaken by the Settlement Contractors during the spring and summer months, and flexible operations by the Bureau of Reclamation.

### Feather River

Water management entities on the Feather River, using conserved water and contract supplies, have been able to irrigate over 82,600 acres of Pacific Flyway habitat this fall, including over 2,000 acres of habitat in the Gray Lodge Wildlife Area. This habitat is located mainly in Butte County, with additional acreage in Glenn and Sutter Counties.

### Yuba River

Water management entities receiving water from the projects on the Yuba River, working with the Yuba County Water Agency, are delivering enough water to irrigate approximately 19,000 acres of habitat in Yuba County this winter.

### Bear River

Water deliveries from the Bear River to landowners in the South Sutter Water District wrapped up for the year in October. Landowners in this district have mainly utilized groundwater

supplies to flood harvested rice fields to provide approximately 30,000 acres of Pacific Flyway habitat in southern Sutter County.

### Yolo Bypass

The Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area has also been able to flood 6,000 acres of habitat, made up of harvested rice ground as well as managed wetlands, this fall. This habitat is located in Yolo County.

### National Wildlife Refuges

The Sacramento Valley National Wildlife Refuges (which include the Sacramento NWR, Delevan NWR, Colusa NWR, Sutter NWR, Butte Sink Unit and Llano Seco Unit) have also been flooding habitat with surface water this fall. Because of the drought, the refuges in the Sacramento Valley are receiving a 25 percent cut to their Level 2 water supplies. The total flooded habitat within the Refuge complex is almost 15,300 acres. The refuges are located in Butte, Glenn, Colusa and Sutter Counties.

Cumulatively, these water management actions have resulted in almost 203,000 acres of valuable Pacific Flyway habitat in the Sacramento Valley that otherwise would not be available. While providing a good summary of efforts occurring in the Sacramento Valley this fall to provide Pacific Flyway habitat, this document is not an exhaustive description. Additional habitat is being irrigated throughout the Valley on a smaller scale and efforts will continue through the winter months. Substantial rain events and the resultant lifting of curtailments (including Term 91) will allow water management entities and landowners to provide additional habitat in this valuable region of the Pacific Flyway.