

**“It is more critical
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balance for crops
and wildlife”**



- Virginia Getz

Pictured: Virginia Getz

NCWA
Northern California Water Association



The Radiant Biologist.

Virginia was feeling a bit down.

She was hoping to land an internship during the summer break. Prospects were bleak. Virginia's attitude even more so.

Ever since she was eight years old, Ed could see it in her eyes. His little girl was destined to become a biologist. But during a pivotal moment in Virginia's life, Ed watched as the glow faded from his daughter's eyes.

Back home in Pacific Grove for the summer, Ed could not stomach the sight of his youngest daughter moping around any longer. He packed up the car and the pair hit Highway 101 back to the University of California, Davis.

Virginia wasn't sure how much good the trip would do. Many of her classmates were already eyeing different careers. This was at a time when there were fewer nonprofit organizations and public agencies wanted people with significant wildlife management.

Professor Dennis Raveling could see Virginia's passion. He was not about to let her fall off track. The respected waterfowl advocate and scientist pushed Virginia to follow her dream. The summer chat gave her the confidence she needed. And Ed would once again see the glow was back.

The shine would become nearly blinding as Virginia landed her first job. Hired as a U.S. Forest Service deer monitor, she was out in different parts of the Sierra Nevada nearly every week.

But little did she know that a duck hunting trip would take her to new heights. She didn't get any ducks that day but being out in the field with the waterfowl spoke to her in a way that no other species had before.

"The first time I heard the noise of a big flock of snow geese it made my heart race."

Virginia would get to follow the flight path of these birds to her next adventure. By the early 2000s, the waterfowl conservation organization Ducks Unlimited came calling. And today, Getz is the conservation programs manager, which means she oversees habitat conservation in California, Nevada, Hawaii, and Arizona.

Her challenge is no longer finding work but finding ways to make the program she oversees work as efficiently as possible.

"Good science isn't enough; demand and costs of water may be putting birds at risk," said Getz. "We have to find ways to ensure habitat and population gains we've made since the 1980s don't slip in the coming years."

Bird populations and duck habitats rely on water spread out on wetlands and ricelands throughout the Sacramento Valley during the winter months.

"We are heavily reliant on agricultural lands for waterfowl habitat, which means it is more critical than ever that we work in partnership with farmers to ensure a balance for crops and wildlife," said Getz.

Ducks Unlimited works with landowners, farmers, water districts and state and federal agencies to create habitat for ducks and other migrating birds. To date, the organization has worked on 1,300 conservation projects spanning 719,000 acres of habitat in California alone. Getz is at the center of many of them. And it all goes back to a father who believed in his daughter and a professor who provided a bit of optimism to an aspiring biologist.

