

# Going the Distance

by Ken Peterson, California Waterfowl  
Director of Fundraising

**D**uck hunters in Southern California are a hearty group, willing to travel great distances to participate in the hobby they love so much. They come from far and wide, not only to hunt ducks, but to support conservation. California Waterfowl volunteers and partners literally go the distance for the ducks. To all those dedicated waterfowlers and conservationists in Southern California, we thank you! The vastness of the Southern California region also means a lot of travel for California Waterfowl's grassroots fundraising team. However, we've learned from the volunteers that the travel is worth it – and the committees in the



Fotios (Frank) Theodoropoulos is one of many inspiring Southern California volunteers putting on great events and working for the ducks.

region put on events worth the trip. Below is a year-round list of our events for any California duck hunter or supporter to attend.

All California duck hunters benefit from California Waterfowl's highly effective public policy department, youth education efforts, and biology programs – and our influence on Southern California is growing. Thanks to our volunteers in Southern California – who have been patient and determined as we've made progress south – our events are getting bigger, our momentum is growing, and we have our first full-time Southern California staff. It's because of the spirit of our volunteers that we have persisted.

If you currently support California Waterfowl at the grassroots level, we salute you and your efforts. If you're looking

for a way to support an organization that supports you, we have events all throughout the year – make a trip for your hobby that doesn't involve waders or a 3 a.m. wake-up call. We look forward to seeing you at a California Waterfowl Southern California fundraising event this year!

December, 2008 – Imperial Valley Duck Dinner

February, 2009 – San Diego County Dinner in El Cajon

April, 2009 - So Cal Shoot at the Triple B in El Monte

April, 2009 – Simi Valley Dinner

May, 2009 – Orange County Dinner in Buena Park

August, 2009 – Chino Dinner

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Early arriving migrants at the San Jacinto Wildlife Area enjoy the results of increased swamp timothy production and the new management capabilities.

Photo courtesy of Chadd Santerre



Map courtesy of Robert Eddings

# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA REGIONAL UPDATE

by Chadd Santerre, California Waterfowl Wetland Projects Supervisor; and Greg Heydeman, California Waterfowl Southern California Regional Biologist

**N**ow that summer is behind us and the days are getting shorter, we have a little time to relax and look back at California Waterfowl's summer wetland construction accomplishments. Kicking spring off, California Waterfowl began implementing a record five \$1 million North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grants up and down the state. For Southern California, it was an extremely challenging and exciting year, with the establishment of a new field office and two newly funded NAWCA grants. The critical federal funding set the stage for California Waterfowl's expansion south and delivery of our much anticipated projects on both public and private lands.

### San Jacinto

In early February, California Waterfowl opened a new field office in San Jacinto, and with new regional biologist Greg Heydeman at the helm, projects were underway within days.

In March, California Waterfowl received \$1 million in NAWCA funding for the Southern California Coastal and Inland Wetland Project. Landowners and California Waterfowl quickly put the dollars to work. After receiving final federal permit clearance, restoration began at the

Mystic Lake Duck Club, Little Ramona Duck Club, and the Ramona Hunt Club – all of which are directly adjacent to the San Jacinto Wildlife Area (WA). The habitat base was expanded to just over 500 acres of managed seasonal and semi-permanent wetlands.

The ability to recycle water in scarce times has become crucial to private land management. In Southern California, water is at a premium and recirculation systems can mean the difference between having a spring irrigation and not having one – big stuff! Bryan Gallagher, a Mystic Lake Duck Club member, commented, “California Waterfowl's design efficiencies

## In Southern California, water is at a premium and recirculation systems can mean the difference between having a spring irrigation and not having one....

incorporated into our plan will allow us to move water in such a way that we can incorporate management of seasonal wetland habitat along with semi-permanent wetland habitat, something we were unable to do in the past. In addition, the reuse of our fall water in the spring for irrigations through the return water sys-

tem will be a tremendous benefit both from an ecological and a cost perspective.”

On the state funding front, last year's Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) project on the San Jacinto WA has enabled the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) to utilize spring drawdown water for spring irrigations, which have been shown to increase seed production. DFG's Scott Sewell (wildlife habitat supervisor) and his staff set the dinner table for the fall migration with their May irrigations. Scott summed it up best. “The new water delivery system is allowing spring irrigations, which will, for the first time ever, vastly improve our food for waterfowl. At the

same time we will be able to conduct our fall floodup much quicker and provide early habitat to the first migrants. Ultimately our water control and movement has improved capabilities and created habitat conditions we have never been able to provide before.”

DFG is currently developing its management plan for the San Jacinto WA and the Petrero Unit, delaying our scheduled projects on the area for one year. Once the plan is done, the California Waterfowl and WCB projects will be completed. Additional restoration efforts will expand wetland habitat areas, which should be available for the 2009 waterfowl season.



The Mecca Land Company saw significant restoration this past summer with contributing funds from California Waterfowl's Imperial Valley NAWCA grant, along with contributions from the owners. The work allows the club to flood-up quicker and produced a bounty of habitat for the upcoming season.

Photo courtesy of Chadd Santerre

If you own or manage property within the Coachella or Imperial Valleys and may be interested in receiving 50 percent of the construction costs and California Waterfowl technical assistance, design, and construction management, please call Greg Heydeman at (951) 654-0064 or Chadd Santerre at (530) 868-5072. Sign ups will be completed by the end of the year.

Until then, the habitat enhanced (145 acres) and restored (320 acres) in 2007 has been managed for seed production and will offer waterfowlers an opportunity to see California Waterfowl project results.

### The Imperial Valley/Coachella

In addition to the restoration and enhancement projects at the San Jacinto WA and the surrounding private waterfowl clubs, California Waterfowl biologists have also been busy at work with projects

## ...new habitat is already available for hunters.

on the Imperial Valley WA's Wister Unit and private duck clubs scattered throughout Imperial and Coachella Valleys.

Extensive enhancement work, made possible by yet another \$1 million grant from NAWCA, is being completed on the Wister Unit and new habitat is already



The first step of California Waterfowl's NAWCA enhancement activities this past spring at the Imperial Valley Wildlife Area's Wister Unit was the removal of nearly 10 years of salt cedar and phragmites growth from levees and units.

Photo courtesy of Chadd Santerre

available for hunters. Most of the area has, until this year, been completely choked off and not huntable due to a lack of open water. In the projects at Wister, salt cedar trees that had been growing for nearly a decade were removed from the levees, and

the units were burned to get rid of dense stands of cattails. New, high-line water delivery ditches have been built and all new water control structures installed. The new infrastructure will provide greater management capabilities and will lead to better waterfowl food production. In all, 330 acres will be enhanced this year on the wildlife area, with another 387 acres of enhancement to take place in spring 2009.

California Waterfowl also completed projects on four private duck clubs in the region. The Mecca Land Company, Club Branches, Labco Duck Club, and Rancho de Los Patos all underwent significant enhancement work with the help of NAWCA funding. These projects included: combining many small units into larger units, adding new water control structures, adding islands, and leveling ponds. The wetland enhancements will ultimately contribute to better water management and conservation, increased wintering habitat, and greater waterfowl food production. In total, 350 acres of private property were enhanced with another five private projects scheduled for early next spring.

In the design of all these California Waterfowl projects, units were built to have approximately a half-foot of fall across them. The design allows for up to a

## CONSERVATION SPOTLIGHT

### San Jacinto Wildlife Area Tree Planting

Last spring, a dedicated group of volunteers gathered for the annual cleanup day at the San Jacinto Wildlife Area. In addition to normal cleanup around the blinds, this year included a riparian tree planting event with California Waterfowl's new Southern California Regional Biologist Greg Heydeman. With early spring being the perfect time to establish tree cuttings while they are still dormant, volunteers began to show up at 7:00 a.m. with tree pruners and shears in hand.

During the previous summer's restoration and enhancement projects conducted by California Waterfowl biologists and Department of Fish and Game (DFG) staff, a 1300 foot riparian swale was created, tying into existing riparian habitat. Volunteers took willow and cottonwood cuttings from nearby trees, and worked tirelessly into the afternoon placing them along the length of the new riparian swale. In all, roughly 500 willow and cottonwood cuttings were planted by the group of volunteers. Given a few years to grow, this new area will become an excellent habitat refuge that many types of wildlife will call home. Great effort everyone!

California Waterfowl plans on restoring more wetland and riparian areas at San Jacinto during the 2008 and 2009 construction season. Contact Greg Heydeman for your chance to help out and take an active part in creating a more diverse and healthy habitat base at one of Southern California's most popular wildlife areas.



Following the removal of salt cedar and phragmites, fields were burned by DFG staff to allow California Waterfowl biologists to survey, design, and start construction.

Photo courtesy of Greg Heydeman

foot of water in the low areas of the wetland unit, and six to eight inches in the high areas. Club managers can use the design to manage water to increase cost-effectiveness, and in turn provide wintering waterfowl access to forage in the shallow waters during the migration. Giving the private duck clubs and units at Wister WA the ability to drain water quickly during early spring allows for greater production of moist soil plants such as swamp

the fall and winter months, and thus improving hunting opportunities.

California Waterfowl is currently looking for interested landowners in the Imperial and Coachella Valleys to participate in the Phase II proposal of this NAWCA project series. The NAWCA program offers a 50:50 cost share for private clubs looking to improve wetland habitat, hunting, and management capabilities. California Waterfowl provides all

**...improved drainage will contribute to a superior growing environment for waterfowl feed and better overall wetland quality, helping to maintain high bird use during the fall and winter months, and thus improving hunting opportunities.**

timothy. At the same time, easy water management also allows for rapid irrigations when the timothy needs it most. Draining water from ponds quickly also prevents the continuous build-up of salts in the ponds and facilitates the leaching of existing salts from the soil. Over time, improved drainage will contribute to a superior growing environment for waterfowl feed and better overall wetland quality, helping to maintain high bird use during

of the technical assistance, design, and construction management at no charge to the landowners. A tour of completed projects in the area can be arranged for interested landowners. If you would like more information on the grant program, or would like to schedule a California Waterfowl biologist for a site visit of your property, contact California Waterfowl Southern California Regional Biologist Greg Heydeman, at 951-654-0064 or

**...everyone involved is dedicated to investing in the future – to ensure that Southern California wetlands are preserved...**

Wetland Programs Supervisor Chadd Santerre, at 530-868-5072.

The landscape scale approach to habitat improvement efforts taking place within the San Jacinto, Coachella, and Imperial Valleys are the first steps for California Waterfowl and project partners in addressing habitat needs for waterfowl in the Southern California region. Habitat improvements are long overdue, and everyone involved is dedicated to investing in the future – to ensure that Southern California wetlands are preserved and can be managed in an efficient and productive manner. The quality and quantity of waterfowl habitat is the key element in maximizing waterfowl numbers and use throughout the region.

The development and growth of staff at California Waterfowl has taken some time, but our success throughout other parts of the state is now allowing us to expand into new areas. Ultimately, through federal and state funding, California Waterfowl would like to work on as many properties as there are willing participants. The key to waterfowl use and numbers within the region will depend upon the availability of quality habitat as we move forward. By taking a landscape scale approach, we're improving habitat that currently exists and increasing wetland acreage where possible. In time, waterfowl numbers will increase as a result of these projects. California Waterfowl, along with our project partners, are investing significant resources to make wetland improvements a reality. 🦆

# an evening with OUR STARS

In August, California Waterfowl celebrated the vast contributions of its volunteers at the annual appreciation dinner and awards ceremony. Congratulations to our 2008 award winners, and thanks to all our volunteers who are helping to preserve our wetlands, waterfowl, and outdoor heritage. For complete coverage of the evening's awards, visit [www.calwaterfowl.org](http://www.calwaterfowl.org).



Nick Piediscalzi receives the Hunter-Conservationist award for work helping California Waterfowl connect with the non-hunting community through food, art, ethics, lifestyle, and conservation.



Tracey Fremd, California Waterfowl board member and Women's Outdoor Connections co-chair, presents awards to exceptional volunteers making efforts to get women involved and outdoors.



John Carlson, representing the Fish and Game Commission, speaks about California Waterfowl and its dedicated volunteers.



The Eberhardt family is awarded the Ray Lewis Lifetime Achievement award for their family-wide contributions to waterfowl and wetlands conservation.



California Waterfowl rewarded its outstanding volunteers at the annual Convention dinner.



Artemis Award recipient Betty Adamson enjoys the dinner with her husband, waterfowl artist Harry Adamson.



Youth and Education volunteer Bill Keller wins a sculpture in the raffle.

# CHAIR'S MESSAGE

(continued from page 5)

Kelli and I reached my blind, a small clump of tules, without scaring the geese. It was 10 minutes before shoot time. For some reason, they did not return to the refuge. Shoot time arrived and there they were, barely 100 yards away, and they would have to fly directly over me on their way to safety. Thoughts of bagging several geese suddenly seemed very realistic, turning a day of expected slim pickings into a hopeful one.

Maybe the geese were comfortable with their surroundings, as they continued to roost on my pond. Their presence and continuous cacophony of calls attracted other snow geese flying through the valley. Hundreds of geese turned into thousands, and soon a tornado of geese developed over Kelli and me. The geese were oblivious to our presence. Their spiral brought them no more than 10 yards

over our heads and in short order filled my small pond. Geese were swimming among our decoys, barely 25 yards from where we were hidden.

Kelli understood that I was not going to fire my shotgun. Having a grind of several thousand geese near arm's reach was an outdoor experience too incredible to describe. The thought of spoiling the moment by shooting a bird or two out of thousands never entered my mind. Kelli enjoyed this spectacle with me, never moving a muscle.

For several hours, geese continued to come and go. Kelli and I were the only hunters on the marsh that day, and the geese must have sensed that they were safe. Suddenly, all was quiet. Then, as if on cue, the geese lifted in a grinding mass and passed no more than 20 feet over us. The roar of their wings was deafening. In

an instant, they were gone and the spectacle was over.

Our hunt was finished. I gathered up our gear, and Kelli and I walked silently back to our vehicle. As I drove back to my duck club cabin, I reflected on the morning. I felt so lucky to been part of the ultimate duck hunter's dream. The experience was incredible. I had participated in the greatest hunt ever...and I did not fire a single shot.

Enjoyment in the outdoors can be measured in many different ways. Success is not always about how many shots are fired or how many birds are on the strap. As you venture forth this waterfowl season, enjoy your passions to the fullest. Another waterfowl season has begun, and I wish all of you a safe and successful year. 🦆

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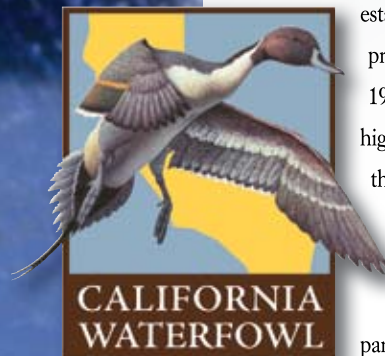
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