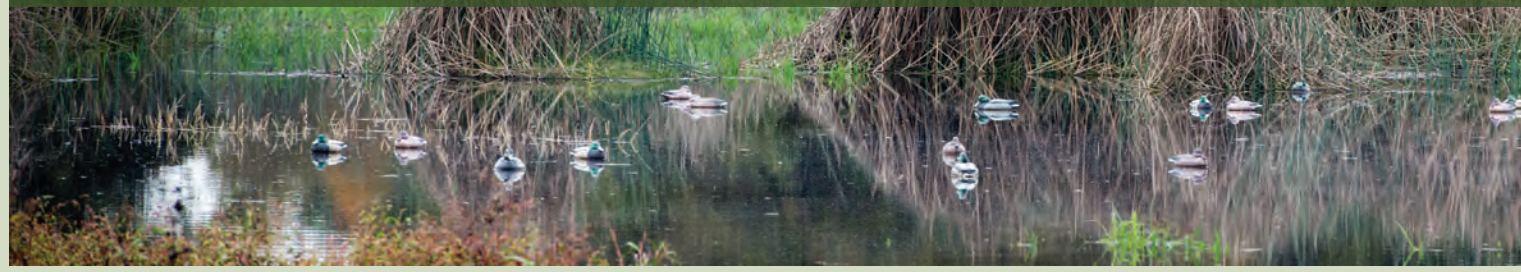


# A LITTLE ISLAND Paradise

## Generous Donation to CWA Pays It Forward



Story and photos by **ANDREW CREASEY**, ASSOCIATE EDITOR .....

Nestled in the Butte Sink, surrounded by manicured rice fields, sloughs and irrigation canals, sits a parcel of land that appears untouched by human engineering.

In a valley dominated by agriculture, there's no evidence the land has seen a single seed of rice or walnut sapling introduced into its ground. Instead, tules, watergrass and smartweed emerge near copses of willow, oak and cottonwood trees.

In short, to step on the land is to step back in time, before human settlement, before farming operations enveloped the Sacramento Valley. Not surprisingly, the duck hunting is good.

And thanks to a generous donation by CWA Diamond Benefactor John Simmons, this property has been entrusted to California Waterfowl.

For almost 40 years, the property has been known as the Butte Creek Island Ranch. Simmons, who lives and works in Davis, bought the property with three other partners in 1977, and over many years ended up owning the entire thing.

The duck club is 110 acres sandwiched between Butte Creek and Sanborn Slough and just across the Gridley-Colusa Highway from the Little Dry Creek Unit of the Upper Butte Basin Wildlife Area. There are 89 acres of wetlands and 21

acres of upland habitat perfect for nesting ducks, as well as wood duck nest boxes scattered throughout the riparian areas.

"It's a wild kind of area," Simmons said. "You get to see a lot of nature, as well as participate in the sport of hunting."

Simmons, now 85, said he couldn't handle managing the property any longer. With the property worth an estimated \$1.1 million, he knew he could sell it, but he also knew the sale would trigger a whopping capital gains tax of around 50 percent. So, working with fellow CWA member and financial planner David Siegel, he came up with another solution: Donate the land to CWA and get a nifty tax deduction.

"I would have a hard time trying to manage the property by myself anymore. This was the easiest way out for me," Simmons said. "It gives CWA a place to expand what they do. I think it was a win for both of us."

It's not the first time Simmons has supported California Waterfowl. In 2011, he set up what's known as a charitable lead trust: He put a



John Simmons  
FILE PHOTO

duplex he owned in a trust that would donate to CWA every quarter for the rest of Simmons' life.

With the donation of an entire duck club, Simmons has given CWA the rarest of gifts.

Some have pointed out that Simmons passed on the chance to make \$1 million, but he doesn't see it that way.

"It was a gift on my part, but it wasn't a gift in vain," Simmons said. "I think I did a lot of good, and I enjoy feeling the way I do about helping someone else."

CWA is still working to decide how it will use the property. Hunters with existing lease agreements will continue to use the club this season. Looking ahead, CWA will be pursuing grant funding to pay for wetland enhancements, said Jake Messerli, CWA vice president of conservation programs.

"It's a beautiful marsh in the heart of one of the most prestigious wetland basins in the country," Messerli said. "The property will serve our Hunting Heritage and Education programs well, and it will be extremely satisfying to share a piece of the Butte Sink with our membership."

"This is a pretty rare gift, especially considering it's in the Butte Sink, which is some high-value real estate,"

Messerli said. "It's a unique opportunity to give back to our members."

Simmons put it simply: "I thought I could do something nice for the birdies and CWA."

Continued on page 36: California Waterfowl's land holdings.

**'It's a beautiful marsh in the heart of one of the most prestigious wetland basins in the country ... it will be extremely satisfying to share a piece of the Butte Sink with our membership.'**

*– Jake Messerli, CWA vice president of conservation programs*

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# CALIFORNIA WATERFOWL LAND HOLDINGS

With John Simmons' donation, California Waterfowl now owns five properties totaling more than 4,800 acres from the Tulare Basin to the Butte Sink. Each property provides CWA the opportunity to put its money where its mouth is on habitat restoration and maintenance, as well as to provide hunting opportunity for the public through CWA's Hunt Program. These are the other four properties:

## GRIZZLY RANCH, Suisun Marsh, 982 acres

CWA's flagship property features quality hunting through the Hunt Program, a challenging sporting clays course where CWA holds fun shoots, and facilities for summer hunter education camps and school field trips where kids learn about waterfowl and wetlands. It also includes a training field for the California Retriever Training Association. Purchased in 2012 with state and private grants, a portion of the property's operation and maintenance costs are supported by a very generous donation that helped create a quasi-endowment.

## DENVERTON, Suisun Marsh, 762 acres

This property features public hunting, a training field for the California Retriever Training Association, and a clubhouse that can be used for overnight guests and camps. Purchased in 2012 with state and private grants, a portion of its operation and maintenance costs are supported by the quasi-endowment.

## GOOSE LAKE, Tulare Basin, 2,175 acres

This holding includes two properties – the Houchin and Badger Almond units – in the historic Tulare Basin, which CWA is pleased to help restore. It features public waterfowl and upland hunting. Purchased in 2013 with state and private grants, a portion of its operation and maintenance costs are supported by the quasi-endowment.

## QUIMBY ISLAND, Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, 789 acres

This Delta Island will host its first public hunts this year through the CWA Hunt Program. It is accessible by boat only, which limits how extensively it can be used for CWA programs. This island was a 2015 gift from CWA Diamond Benefactor Ellis Stephens, who also gave CWA a \$2.2 million quasi-endowment to care for the property.



### Do you have a club you'd like to donate?

If you own property and would like to leave a legacy, please contact Vice President of Conservation Programs Jake Messerli at 916-648-1406 ext. 141, or [jmesserli@calwaterfowl.org](mailto:jmesserli@calwaterfowl.org).

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