



# CALIFORNIA WETLANDS INITIATIVE

## — 2025 IMPACT REPORT —

DUCKS UNLIMITED'S CALIFORNIA WETLANDS INITIATIVE FOCUSES ON RESTORING, ENHANCING AND PROTECTING WETLANDS USED BY MILLIONS OF WATERFOWL AND OTHER MIGRATORY BIRDS EACH YEAR IN THE HEART OF THE PACIFIC FLYWAY.

WE'RE PLEASED TO PRESENT THIS YEARLY UPDATE ON DUCKS UNLIMITED'S PROGRESS CONSERVING CRITICAL WETLAND HABITAT IN CALIFORNIA.





## MESSAGE FROM WESTERN REGION, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, JEFF MCCREARY

The Pacific Flyway has four landscapes critical for waterfowl: Alaska, Great Salt Lake, Southern Oregon Northeastern California and the Central Valley. California encompasses two of these four landscapes, so our California Wetlands Initiative is vital to keep the flyway healthy, and we are doing just that. In DU's Fiscal Year 2025, we completed 35 projects totaling 16,367 acres of conservation in California. To do that, we raised \$2.5 million in Initiative philanthropy to support a combined \$25.45 million in public and private conservation expenditures. This brings us to over 800,000 acres impacted in California to date from a total conservation investment of \$465 million.

We are seeing the fruits of our labor! DU's work in Klamath shows us that a difference can be made. Klamath saw near record waterfowl production this year, the largest freshwater wetland restoration project outside of the Everglades completed its first phase, and innovative science is underway to demonstrate the value of wetlands for birds, fish, and people. Team DU in California continues to claw back wetlands in the San Francisco Bay important to scaup and canvasbacks; and revitalize massive infrastructure at the Sutter National Wildlife Refuge to help better serve birds, agriculture, and hunters alike.

Conservation is challenging and requires teamwork. The flyway faces habitat threats from many sources. The California Wetlands Initiative is our answer—and together, we'll keep making a difference for the Flyway and California's future.

Thank you for helping make a lasting difference!

**JEFFREY MCCREARY**

*Ducks Unlimited Western Region, Director of Operations*



## CURRENT STATUS OF CALIFORNIA

California has lost more than 90 percent of the wetlands that millions of waterfowl and other birds traditionally relied on.

Despite the profound loss of so much habitat, 60 percent of the Pacific Flyway's birds still spend their winters or migrate through California. Nowhere else in the world do so many millions of waterfowl rely on so little habitat. The Central Valley alone supports nearly eight million wintering ducks and geese every year.

But these important habitats for birds and other wildlife are under constant threat from droughts and habitat loss. An occasional wet winter provides only temporary relief and our work to conserve, restore and enhance important habitats does not stop.

## CONSERVATION DELIVERY THROUGHOUT THE STATE

### ● KLAMATH WETLANDS REBOUND AFTER YEARS OF DROUGHT

After a winter of record-breaking snowfall, the Klamath Basin experienced a dramatic revival as snowmelt surged through the landscape, bringing life back to the Lower Klamath and Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuges. At Lower Klamath, over 35,000 acres are now fully flooded — levels not seen since 2008. Nearby, Tule Lake's wetlands have reached their full 12,000-acre capacity, thanks to the Tulelake Irrigation District pumping 33,000 acre-feet of water through Sheepy Ridge. This influx has revitalized habitats that had been dry for years, supporting millions of migrating waterfowl, including an estimated one million ducks last February alone.

Beyond the refuges, over 30,000 acres of private farmland have been intentionally flooded to provide critical staging and foraging grounds for birds traveling the Pacific Flyway. The return of water has also boosted local waterfowl production, with lush wetlands offering ideal breeding conditions. This comeback is the result of coordinated efforts by Ducks Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tribes, the Bureau of Reclamation, and local water districts. It highlights the transformative impact of adequate water resources on both wildlife and the communities that depend on the Klamath Basin's rich ecosystems.





## UPGRADES AT GRAY LODGE WILDLIFE AREA

Big improvements have been underway at one of California's most popular wildlife destinations. As part of Phase 2 of the Gray Lodge Wildlife Area Habitat Enhancement and Auto Tour Route project, Ducks Unlimited is leading efforts to restore 765 acres of habitat, including 696 acres of seasonal wetlands and 69 acres of uplands. Restoration work involves recontouring fields, excavating swales, building habitat islands, and replacing aging water-control structures. Nearly 25,000 feet of internal service roads will be upgraded to improve year-round access for staff and management.



The project also includes enhancements for public access and recreation, such as expanded wildlife viewing, new mobility-impaired hunting blinds in Field 58, and upgraded pit blinds in Field 94. Funded by a \$4 million grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board's Inland Wetlands Program, the project supports long-term conservation goals for Gray Lodge and the broader Central Valley. Once complete, it will strengthen Gray Lodge's role as a premier destination along the Pacific Flyway, benefiting both wildlife and the people who come to enjoy it.

## SHORELINE RESILIENCE AND HABITAT RESTORATION AT MOSS LANDING WILDLIFE AREA



Progress continues on the Moss Landing Wildlife Area Shoreline Resilience and Habitat Enhancement Project, a collaborative effort led by Ducks Unlimited, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Wildlife Conservation Board. Located along Elkhorn Slough, the project addresses sea level rise and shoreline erosion while restoring critical nesting habitat for the federally threatened western snowy plover. The first phase of a 920-foot setback levee is complete and settling, with future work set to protect 130 acres of restored salt ponds that support up to 20% of the Monterey Bay region's plover population.

Additional improvements include regrading eroded banks, upgrading trails and parking, and installing interpretive signs to enhance public access while protecting sensitive ecosystems.





Beyond infrastructure, restoration efforts are revitalizing high marsh areas with native plants and expanding eelgrass beds through transplanting, which helps stabilize sediment and improve water quality. These enhancements not only support wildlife but also improve recreational access for fishing, clamming, and nature exploration. By clearly defining trails and reducing erosion, the project balances conservation with community use. Building on previous restoration phases, the Moss Landing Wildlife Area project serves as a model for integrating habitat protection, climate resilience, and public engagement along California's dynamic coastline.

### ● RESTORING CRITICAL UPLAND HABITAT FOR WATERFOWL IN CALIFORNIA'S YOLO BYPASS

Ducks Unlimited has received nearly \$237,000 from the Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program to launch the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area Parker Unit Fields 2 and 7 Upland Enhancement Project. This initiative will restore approximately 49 acres of upland nesting habitat in California's Sacramento Valley, a region where cinnamon teal, mallards, and ring-necked pheasants are facing steep population declines due to habitat loss from urbanization and agricultural changes. By planting native grasses and pollinator species near permanent ponds and seasonal wetlands, the project aims to create essential nesting and brood-rearing areas for these birds.

The restoration involved removing invasive plants, planting native vegetation, and installing a sprinkler irrigation system in Field 2 to support spring germination. Field 2, located within the flood-prone bypass, was planted in spring and irrigated, while Field 7, outside the bypass, was planted in the fall using dryland methods. In addition to benefiting waterfowl and upland birds, the project will enhance public recreation by supporting stronger bird populations in and around the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area's hunting zones.





## ● ENHANCING WETLANDS AND BOOSTING RECREATION IN THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

Ducks Unlimited recently completed a major restoration project at the Blue Goose Unit within California's San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, enhancing over 500 acres of wetlands and uplands in the San Joaquin Valley. Crews replaced outdated water-control structures, removed levees, and reshaped the land to improve water distribution. These upgrades created new islands and raised levee banks, significantly expanding summer wetland habitat and providing vital nesting and resting areas for ducks, geese, and shorebirds migrating along the Pacific Flyway.

Beyond supporting wildlife, the project delivers broader environmental and community benefits. It improves flood management, filters nutrients, stores carbon, and recharges groundwater, boosting the land's resilience. Connections to nearby wetlands were restored, and public hunting access was expanded with additional blinds. Local contractors carried out the work, keeping jobs and funding in the community. The project was funded by the Bonneville Environmental Foundation and the California Duck Stamp Program, ensuring long-term conservation and biodiversity gains.



## ● IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE IN CONSERVATION

In the Western Region, Ducks Unlimited's agriculture programs are building partnerships with farmers, ranchers, and landowners to conserve vital wetlands and grasslands while sustaining agricultural productivity. Through innovative incentive programs, technical assistance, and collaborative restoration projects, DU helps producers implement practices that improve soil health, enhance water management, and create wildlife habitat, all while keeping working lands working. These efforts demonstrate that productive agriculture and conservation can thrive together, ensuring a healthier landscape for people and wildlife alike.

## ● MAKING CONSERVATION HEADWAY THROUGH SCIENCE INITIATIVES

Ducks Unlimited and its scientific partners have several studies planned or underway to study waterfowl and their habitats in the Pacific Flyway. DU is committed to using science to guide all our conservation efforts. These studies help us understand how and where to best use our supporters' dollars for on-the-ground conservation. DU is either funding or participating in nine current studies to better understand waterfowl and their habitats in the West.

## ● POLICY WIN – PROP 4 FUNDING APPROPRIATED

Ducks Unlimited's Policy team works diligently to defend our mission and vision. We continue to play a key role in fighting for California's wetlands and wildlife-friendly agricultural fields and support conservation-friendly bills.

Last year, the DU policy team and volunteers worked collaboratively with the Prop 4 campaign to successfully get the \$10 billion Parks, Environment, Energy, and Water Bond Measure passed by voters. Last year, vital funding sources were threatened to not be appropriated by the legislature due to an ongoing internal Budget dispute. This would have reduced the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) budget so significant grants would most certainly be unavailable. So, DU policy once again turned to our amazing supporters to submit letters to the Speaker of the Assembly, the Budget Chair, and the Governor's office, urging them to appropriate and release this critical funding that many DU projects rely upon. Thanks to their efforts and an overwhelming response, funding was included and has been made available to the Wildlife Conservation Board and others.

As policy and the legislature is ever-changing, our team stays active to support, defend, and best represent Ducks Unlimited with policy issues that are in alignment with our mission and vision.

## ***THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT IN CALIFORNIA!***

Your support of the California Wetlands Initiative creates tremendous conservation impact. Guided by actionable science, Ducks Unlimited's Conservation Team leverage the DU dollar against many other public dollars to conserve important habitats. Private funding that is broadly restricted at the initiative level gives our conservation staff the flexibility to move many projects forward, infusing funds when needed, to survey and design projects, work with stakeholders, or write and submit applications for large, competitive state and federal grants, and also includes support for our science and policy efforts. In California, your gifts are leveraged up to 10:1 with public and other partner funding. You truly make the difference between what we hope to do and what we actually accomplish.

Last year, we relaunched the California Wetlands Initiative—in collaboration with the Klamath Basin Initiative—to raise \$25 million in private philanthropy to match \$100 million in public funding by 2028, primarily from the Wildlife Conservation Board and Prop 4 funding.

This past fiscal year, we raised \$2.45 million of private philanthropy – and with your continued support we'll see a thriving California ecosystem that supports Pacific Flyway waterfowl, vibrant wetlands, wildlife-friendly agriculture, and resilient communities.



**SCAN THE QR CODE TO VISIT THE  
CALIFORNIA WETLANDS INITIATIVE  
WEBSITE, AND TO KEEP UP WITH DU'S  
PROGRESS IN OUR STATE'S WETLANDS.**





**THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT!**

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