Land of the West Wind

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Walking the Tightrope:

The Challenge of Managing a Wetland and Managing Expectations

By Jeff Taylor, SRCD Water Manager

The year 2020 has certainly been a time of difficult situations and many of us are taking inventory on the things that are most important in life. With the ongoing concerns of a global pandemic, political and social unrest, and economic downturns, many are grasping for some level of normality. While shelter in place mandates have gripped the state, Grizzly Island Wildlife Area remained open and saw record numbers of visitors during the late spring and summer. Local residents that never knew the Suisun Marsh was right in the backyards arrived in droves in an effort to get out of their houses and visit nature. With all the stressors of life these past few months, it seems that the private clubs and the wetlands of Suisun Marsh became one of the more important aspects of life to get out and enjoy.

Smoke in Suisun September 9th, 2020

The stewards of Suisun Marsh and the private landowners have continued to conduct business as usual to the best of our abilities. Many clubs were able to leach and irrigate their properties and start the growth cycle of beneficial food sources. The lack of rain this year was troubling, but over all the water quality remained Good through the most important months of water management.

The wetland managers are in full swing conducting pond management and infrastructure maintenance in preparation for the rapidly approaching waterfowl season. The end payoff for most of these efforts is a quality hunting season and the ability to put a few waterfowl in the freezer for the days. Landowners and managers can do everything right for their properties, but at the end, the management is only half of the equation.

(*Continued on page 6*)

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Quarterly newsletter of the Suisun Resource Conservation District
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SRCD's public meetings are held at 2 PM on the second Wednesday of each month at the Solano County Supervisors Chambers 675 Texas Street Fairfield, CA 94533

SRCD represents private landowners of the Suisun Marsh at the Federal, State, and local levels. Its historic goal has been to achieve a water supply of adequate quality so that preferred wetland habitat values will be retained through appropriate management practices Through cooperation with landowners and various agencies, SRCD seeks to develop new programs aimed at protecting and improving the Suisun Marsh for future generations.

SRCD UPDATE

Suisun Resource Conservation District Water Manager Biologists

Fall Flood Up Program

The fall flood up program continues this year with coordination between SRCD and the Solano County Mosquito Abatement District (SCMAD). Mosquito abatement waivers are available on the SRCD website. More information is available on page 5.

Individual Management Plan Updates

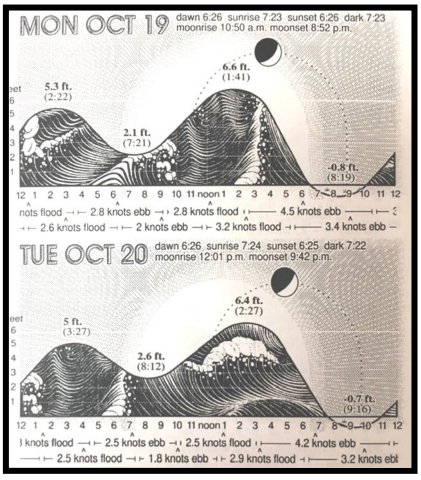
The SRCD is helping Suisun Marsh landowners update their individual management plans which are required for permitting habitat management activities. SRCD has met with 112 duck clubs so far, and next steps will be to distribute draft plans through the month of October. If you have any questions on the individual management plan update for your club, please contact your water manager.

Actual Work Reporting

Reminder that "actual work performed" reports are due on December 15th. If you are a landowner in the Marsh and you have not submitted your report yet, please find the time to do so. Call the SRCD office at (707) 426-2431 or contact your water manager.

Best Flood Windows - What are the tides like for flood-up?

Last year we saw very poor tides for flood-up in October. This caused problems for duck clubs that did not have all their dirt work done early, and it also created challenges for mitigating mosquito production and regulating dissolved oxygen content in the sloughs. This year, tides are also marginal, but there are a few days that stand out as better than others for flood-up.



October 15th to 21st will have the highest tides of the month. This should help give a final push to the clubs to be completely flooded by season opener on October 24th.

Water Quality Monitoring

Many landowners are continuing best management practices recommended to reduce the amount of low dissolved oxygen (DO) in waters drained from managed wetlands into the adjacent sloughs during the fall season. SRCD continues to monitor water quality in the smaller slough channels that are prone to low DO events and actively coordinated with SCMAD and landowners to ensure successful and floodup and healthy waterways. The high temperatures this year may increase DO concerns.

YSI Sonde Equipment

What Kind of Water Are You Putting on Your Club?

By SRCD Water Managers

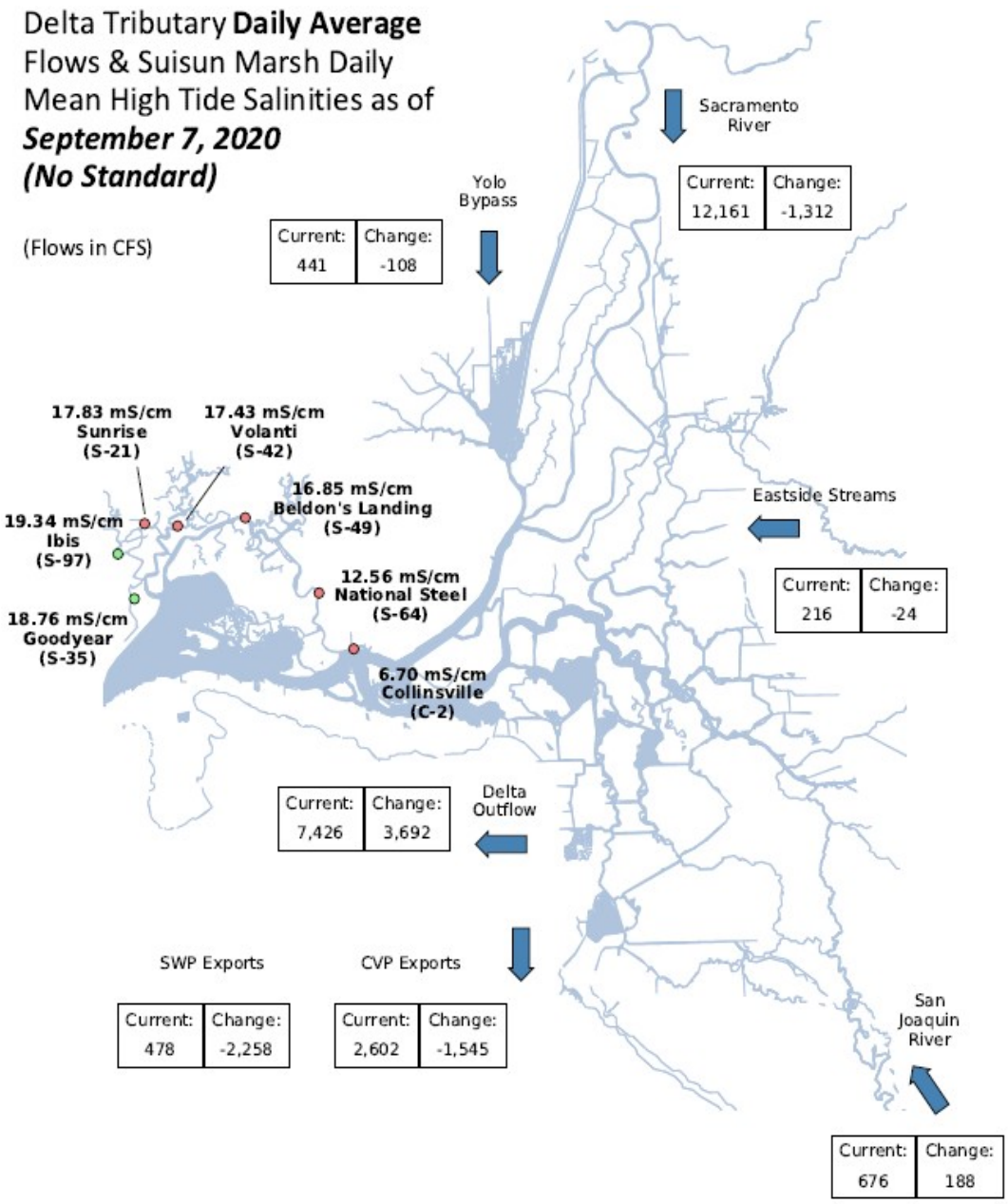
As we begin to flooding up for the 2020-2021 duck season, it is a good idea to consider the water conditions in the marsh.

2020 has been a dry year, so California has entered drought conditions. The 2019-2020 water year ended October 1st and only had 24.6 inches of precipitation in the San Joaquin region compared to 50 inches in 2018-2019. (see the year's precipitation index on page 8)

What does this mean for your club?

Most duck club owners will begin a flood-up in early October. Unfortunately, this is usually the worst time of year for applied water salinities, and this year is no exception. **It will be important to circulate** your ponds heavily when better water becomes available later in the season in order to reduce the accumulation of solutes that may build up in the soil and hamper next year's growth.

For information on slough salinities and updates on water quality, check out the Hydrology section of the SRCD webpage (https://suisunrcd.org/hydrology/) or ask your Water Manager.



Reminder!

The **Fall Salmon Season Unscreened Diversion Restriction**

Landowners are prohibited from diverting unscreened water from Suisun, Montezuma, Nurse, and Denverton Sloughs from November 1 through January 31.

If you are a diverter from a slough or bay that is under the Chinook Salmon Unscreened Diversion Restriction, you will be required close intake gates to 25 percent of maximum capacity for any of your gates without a fish-screen. During the delta smelt restriction period, 20 percent of diversion capacity is allowed.

Marsh Burning for Management

Popularity is Down, but What About Effectiveness?

By SRCD Staff

In the year 2000, there were 89 separate controlled burns applications in Suisun Marsh. This year there were 6. Marsh Management Burn applications as use of this management technique has dropped off significantly in Suisun Marsh. This is most likely due to the incremental increase of burn fees, the difficulty in obtaining permitted burn days, and extreme fire condition. Even after securing a burn permit, there are no guarantees that the weather will cooperate for the days requested. Add in busy fieldwork schedules, and it can be difficult to assemble enough volunteers to pull off a controlled burn, especially when there is not a date assigned in advance. Despite its declining popularity, marsh burning can still be a valuable technique for the control of invasive plant species and reshaping of marsh habitats.

What plant vegetation is cleared by marsh burns?
The short answer is just about everything. Burning Tules, cattails, and phragmites, mowed or no mowed beforehand, is generally a good way to clear dense growth. Saltgrass is another nuisance plants that burn easily.

Marsh burns, in conjunction with discing, mowing, and application of herbicides, are part of the management toolbox for vegetation manipulation, and it is a useful tool to create a multitude of different habitats desirable to waterfowl and other species and control invasive plants.

What are the potential negative effects of marsh burning?
There are always risks that a fire can get out of control and burn more than intended. However, with proper precaution and procedure, this risk is minimized. Peat soil is flammable and can cause flare-ups well after the fire appears to be extinguished. In terms of management implications, burning can be one of the factors that contributes to subsidence of peat soils. Subsidence can be a significant problem for ponds where the elevation is already very low. Burning can cause the loss of some of the organic matter in the soil, translating to a loss of several inches when the pond gets flooded the following year. If you know that your club elevation is low, burning and discing to reset plan succession may not be the best management practice for plant control.

Do the benefits outweigh the costs?
The value of marsh management burns will depend on the opinions of the managers and the needs of the club. However, controlled burning is a valuable management tool that is being underutilized in Suisun Marsh. It can be tricky to get permits and burn day allocations, but marsh burns performed in conjunction with herbicide spraying are very effective at removing dense unwanted brush that can be almost impossible to remove otherwise.

SRCD now maintains a cache of marsh management burn equipment such as McLeods, Pulaskis, drip torches, and a pump. These tools will be available for landowners to borrow.

2020 Solano County Mosquito Abatement District
Fall Flood Program

For the 2020 Fall Flood-up Program, the Solano County Mosquito Abatement District (SCMAD) will continue their 50% cost share for landowners who are required to conduct mosquito abatement treatments. The SRCD is very appreciative of SCMAD's continued partnership and efforts to reduce mosquito abatement costs to the landowner while insuring that we can provide critical waterfowl habitat.

In 2020, SCMAD anticipates an average fall flood-up season for the Marsh and looks forward to partnering with duck club owners in minimizing mosquito production. SRCD encourages those landowners with adequate water control to consider flooding selected areas earlier than October 1, 2020. The goal of this action is to provide habitat for early migrating waterfowl and those displaced from wetland areas outside the Marsh.

Our desire to support early waterfowl habitats is in direct conflict with SCMAD policy encouraging landowners to delay flooding as long as possible. Shorter days with cooler temperatures can help minimize mosquito production and reduce potential conflicts with adjacent communities.

If you wish to flood your property earlier than October 1, you will still be eligible for the cost share program provided that you get **prior approval** to flood from your SCMAD technician. If your property produces mosquitoes and must be chemically treated, the following assistance ratio will apply:
SCMAD – *pay 50% of the Total Cost of Treatment*
Landowner – *pay the remaining 50% of the Total Cost of Treatment*

The overall success of this program is dependent upon cooperation between landowners, SCMAD, and SRCD. It is important that you follow the steps listed below in order to qualify for cost share assistance:

- Landowners must be current with SRCD Maintenance Permit and Program Support fees.
- You must sign the 2020 waiver form and return it to SCMAD prior initiation of flood- up.
- SRCD and SCMAD both must be contacted 24 hours prior to opening any floodgates

If you do not notify both SRCD and SCMAD, you will be ineligible to participate in cost-share.

Landowners that do not take the steps above to help eliminate or reduce mosquito production **will be responsible for 100% of the cost of mosquito abatement on their property**. If you have followed the procedures and still produce mosquitoes, you will receive an invoice from SRCD for 50% of the total cost of abatement which must be paid to SRCD within 25 days of abatement. If you do not pay the invoiced amount within 25 days, SCMAD will hold you responsible for 100% of the cost of abatement.

Here are the contact numbers of the SCMAD technicians and the SRCD Water Managers:

SCMAD:
Main Office: (707) 437-1116
Damon Gray (707) 695-8101
Gary Dula (707) 695-8103
Ian Caldwell (707) 695-8102

SRCD:
Water Manager Office: (707) 426-2431
Tim Edmunds (707) 639-6689
Phelan McKinney (707) 631-0819
Jeff Taylor (707) 639-6690

Season Dates

Northeastern Zone:
Oct 3 - Jan 13 for Ducks
Oct 3 – Nov 29 & Dec 17 - Jan 13 for Geese

Southern San Joaquin Valley Zone:
Oct 24 - Jan 31 for Ducks and Geese

Southern California Zone
Oct 24 - Jan 31 for Ducks and Geese

Colorado River Zone
October 23 - Jan 31 for Ducks and Geese

Balance of State Zone
Oct 24 - Jan 31 for Ducks and Geese
October 3 - 7 for early season Geese

Bag Limits

Hunters may harvest 7 ducks per day which may include: 7 mallards (no more than 2 females), 1 pintail, 2 canvasback, 2 redheads, 2 scaup.

Possession limit is triple the daily bag limit.

2020 COVID Protocols for Grizzly Island Check Station

Vehicle entry: a parking attendant will begin moving reservation holders 2 vehicles at a time to either side of the check station, no more than 4 people at a time waiting in line.

Reservations will be honored up until 1 hour before shoot time. After one hour before shoot time all reservation holders will be directed to end of non-reservation line (the "sweat line"). Hunters will approach the window when directed by staff, and through the plexiglass window, the hunter will be asked to show their reservation letter, hunting license, and appropriate validations. Check station staff will then issue a permit for entry.

General Entry Procedure: First Come First Serve (sweat line)

A drop box will be used to collect permits from hunters. Hunters will be required to show check station staff any birds for harvest records. Social Distancing will be observed during check in and check out.

Managing Wetlands and Expectations (continued)

The winter weather, waterfowl production and survival, timing of migration, and a plethora of other factors may work against the best laid plans to have a good hunting season. Within all the questions and factors out of our hands, its always a good idea to sit and think about what you want to get from your private wetland. Too often, we do not look at both sides of the coin to realize that we can only lead the ducks to water, but we cannot make them stay and eat. With all shapes and sizes of duck clubs in the Marsh, ask yourself (and your members) what they expect from the property? Quality hunt days? More shoot days? Use of the entire property? Implementing a bird sanctuary? Limiting shooters? Filling all available blinds?

With over 120 private wetland clubs, I would assume there are dozens of answers to those questions. Managing the expectations for a quality hunting season (however you decide to measure success) are just as important as managing the property for the waterfowl and the entire food web. The goals of each wetland may vary, but we are all here to enjoy the properties that we are associated with and those that we put our blood, sweat, and tears into year in and year out to pursue a passion that we have all found common ground on.

Maybe, in this time of mounting uncertainties around the country, we can stop and reflect on our pieces of sanctuary and escape determining what expectations are most important. Decide what you hope to gain from your time spent in the Marsh, and know that SRCD is available in many avenues to help optimize the wetlands, and attempt to meet expectations.

Montezuma Wetlands

By Mr. Jim Levine, Managing Partner, Montezuma Wetlands, LLC

The Montezuma Wetlands, located where freshwater and saltwater mix within the San Francisco (SF) Bay Estuary/Delta, once contained one of the most valuable habitats in the SF Bay Region. That was true until the late 1800s, when the Montezuma Wetlands were diked for agricultural use isolating the site from surrounding wildlife. The Montezuma Wetlands Project (MWP) at the eastern end of the Suisun Marsh aims to restore 1,800 acres which once boasted pristine wetlands to their original function. Restoring the Montezuma Wetlands to their initial form should have numerous benefits for the threatened and endangered species of the San Francisco Bay Area Delta, which is the largest brackish estuary on the West Coast. Due to its one-of-a-kind location within the SF Bay Estuary, restoration of tidal wetlands at the MWP has been described by scientists as vital for meeting the regional recovery goals of many listed species. Some of these special-status species include the salt marsh harvest mouse (*Reithrodontomys raviventris*), California least terns (*Sterna antillarum browni*), Delta smelt (*Hypomesus transpacificus*), longfin smelt (*Spirinchus thaleichthys*), and various salmonids.


Collinsville offloading

After being diked, the property gradually subsided to elevations as low as 12 feet below sea level. It became clear that site restoration and levee removal would only be possible if the site was raised to specific tidal wetland elevations. The MWP was an early pioneer of the beneficial reuse of dredge sediments, which is now an increasingly common method used to create wetland habitat. The repurposed sediment, dredged from ports, marinas, and navigation channels in the SF Bay Estuary/Delta and is then transported to the project site by barge. Underpinning the project's efficiencies, the MWP owns and operates the highest rate sediment offloader west of the Mississippi with the ability to offload barges with 3,000 cubic yards of sediment in under 90 minutes. Since receiving its permits in 2001, the Montezuma Wetlands project has safely received over 8 million cubic yards of sediment to raise the first 600-acre phase of the formerly subsided site to ideal target tidal wetland topography. Return of the tides to this first section of the site is scheduled for October 2020.

Permitting the MWP was a decade-long enterprise that was only made possible by employing the highest caliber technical personnel, including former SRCD Board Member Paul Crapuchettes, who led the hydrologic modelling for the project. Technical work completed for the MWP has been conducted by a variety of consultants and scientists across the region and overseen by an interagency Technical Review Team (TRT) led by the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI). The TRT still operates today; their duties include reviewing project reports and providing advice on upcoming plans.


An aerial view of Montezuma Wetlands

The MWP's development of simple technologies and integrating them into efficient 24/7 business operations has made it one of the more prominent beneficial sediment reuse sites in Northern California. The MWP has funded over 15 years of restoration and monitoring work by winning dredge sediment management contracts from the Army Corps of Engineers, local ports, refineries and boat harbors. The MWP is operated by Solano County-based Dutra Dredging in partnership with the Operating Engineers Union Local 3.

Montezuma Wetlands has been a long-time member of the Suisun Resource Conservation District.

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SRCD Newsletter
2544 Grizzly Island Road
Suisun CA 94585

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