



Land of the West Wind

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THE TULE ELK— AN ICONIC SYMBOL OF SUISUN MARSH AND A CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORY



Introduction

Suisun Marsh is noteworthy as a conservation area in California that offers outstanding outdoor recreational opportunities including fishing and waterfowl hunting within a highly urbanized region. Grizzly Island Wildlife Area (GIWA) comprises >15,000 acres of Suisun Marsh and supports a variety of outdoor activities including bird watching, dog training, and wildlife viewing. In the past few decades, GIWA has also become recognized for providing a unique opportunity for big game hunters. GIWA is home to a population of the Tule elk (*Cervus canadensis nannodes*), a California native considered the smallest subspecies of elk in North America. Numerous hunters from across California and beyond apply each year for the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to harvest Tule elk from the managed herd on GIWA. The history behind the presence of Tule elk at GIWA is a conservation success story, beginning with their near extinction in the 1870s.

Tule Elk History

Originally, there were thought to be about 500,000 Tule elk roaming California with their historical range extending in the southwest from Bakersfield along the foothills of the Sierra Nevada west to the Pacific coast and as far north as Mount Shasta. However, after intensive market hunting in the 1800s and displacement by cattle, the Tule elk population dropped precipitously until by the early 1870s, it was unclear that any had survived. In 1874, a crew of laborers draining a wetland on a ranch owned by Henry Miller in the southern Central Valley stumbled across several Tule elk. Imagine the surprise caused by the discovery of these last surviving elk when not a single animal had been seen for four years! Miller recognized the importance of the discovery and diligently protected the last remaining elk in an enclosed pen near Buena Vista Lake 25 miles southwest of Bakersfield. Under his protection, these last few animals began to thrive and reproduce so well that by 1905, the small herd had grown to 140 individuals. The growing herd began damaging and overgrazing the property, and at the turn of century, Miller requested that United States Biological Survey and California Academy of Science work on relocating the population.

[The *Tule Elk*, Cont. on Pg. 5]