



Land of the West Wind

July 2024

Volume 24 Issue III

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]

Land of the West Wind

Quarterly Newsletter
 Suisun Resource Conservation District
 2544 Grizzly Island Road
 Suisun, CA 94585

Main Office: (707) 425-9302
 Water Manager Office: (707) 426-2431
 E-mail: srcd@suisunrcd.org
 Website: www.suisunrcd.org

Staff

Steven Chappell, *Executive Director*
 John Takekawa, *Operations Manager*
 Kelli Perez, *Office Supervisor*
 Tim Edmunds, *Biologist/Water Manager*
 Jeff Taylor, *Biologist/Water Manager*
 Marina Guzman, *Biologist/Water Manager*
 Jesirae Collins, *Biologist*
 Kristin Brandon, *Biologist Analyst*
 Marque Mouton, *LJI Caretaker*

Board of Directors

Tony Vaccarella, *President*
 (650) 365-1642
 Dick Vanderkous, *Finance*
 (707) 228-9950
 H. Kent Hansen, *Agency Relations*
 (510) 459-0649
 Jim Waters, *Legal*
 (510) 409-3864
 Mike Lewis, *Personnel*
 (707) 224-3824

Associate Directors

Dennis Becker
 Kurt Black
 John Eudy
 John Telfer

SRCD's public meetings are every second Wednesday of each month at 2PM 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. It's 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. With cooperation from landowners and various agencies, SRCD develops new programs aimed at protecting and improving the Suisun Marsh for future generations.

THE PAI COST SHARE PROGRAM

The original Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement (SMPA) was signed in 1986 by the Department of Fish and Wildlife, Suisun Resource Conservation District (SRCD), U. S. Bureau of Reclamation, and Department of Water Resources. The purpose of the SMPA is to assure that a dependable water supply and adequate quality is maintained to mitigate adverse effects on Suisun Marsh of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project and a portion of other upstream diversions. The SMPA supported the operations and maintenance of DWR's water distribution facilities (Goodyear Slough Outfall, Morrow Island Distribution System, Roaring River Water Distribution Facility, Suisun Marsh Water Quality Monitoring and Compliance Stations), and the Suisun Marsh Salinity Control Gates.

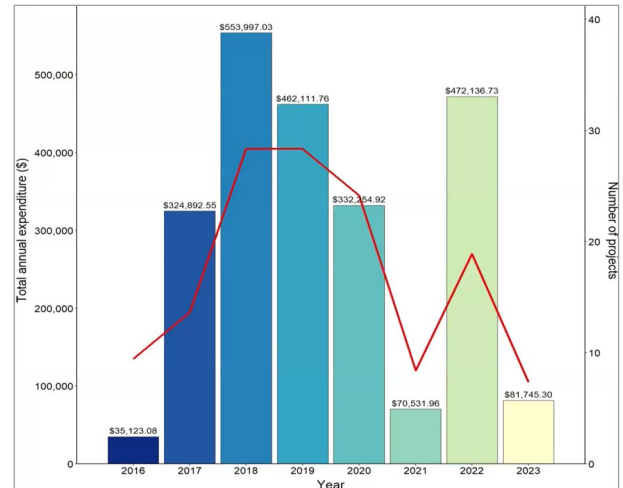
In 2005 and 2015, the SMPA was amended to add programs to support Suisun Marsh landowners managed wetlands water management activities.

These actions are implemented through SRCD programs including the water manager program, updates of landowner's individual ownership management plans, portable pump program, drought response program, and the Preservation Act Implementation (PAI) 75-25, 50-50, and Joint-Use Facility (75-25) cost share grant programs. Under the portable pump program, SRCD maintains and operates nine portable pumps and to assist landowners in meeting 30-day drainage cycles and performing spring leach cycles.

The PAI program was established in 2015. The PAI Program provides funding for activities needed to improve managed wetland facilities, operational efficiency, and water management capabilities. Each cost share program has guidelines, which determine what types of improvements may be eligible for Program participation.

- Drainage Infrastructure Improvements 75/25 Cost Share
- Drainage Efficiency Improvements 50/50 Cost Share
- Joint-Use Facility Improvement 75/25 Cost Share

SRCD administers the grant application and oversees the project review process. The SRCD Water Managers assist landowners in potential project identification, application preparation, and submittal of permitting requirements, and post project inspections for completed projects. Since 2016, the PAI program landowner notification letter is sent out announcing the program at the beginning of the calendar year. A landowner may fill out an application form from the SRCD website (www.srcd.org) and submit a project application. In 2024, there were two application deadlines and review periods. When an application is received, each proposal is examined for completeness and then evaluated by a Technical Review Panel review panel for consistency with each program's guidelines and eligibility criteria.



This summary shows the number of PAI projects and total funding in 2016-2023. Only projects

[PAI Cost Share Program, Cont. on Pg. 3]

If recommended for funding, SRCD then advances the proposal to the Department of Water Resources and the Bureau for funding approval. There have been a total of 173 projects completed from 2016-2023. Of these projects, 84 of the 173 completed projects have been infrastructure improvements totaling \$1.9 million, while another 49 projects totaling \$378,000 have been for swale and ditch work to help improve drainage and water conveyance off of pond bottoms. The Joint-Use Facility fund has supported 40 projects totaling \$877,000. Over the 8 previous years of the program implementation, the 173 projects equate to \$3.1 million worth of improvements across Suisun Marsh, with the private landowners contributing nearly \$800,000 as local cost share.

The 2024 application submittal and review process has concluded for 2024. This year, the first round of reviews advanced 7 projects with funding recommendations, and the second round of applications, (which ended on June 30th) included 13 landowners' applications for review. By the end of 2024 program year, it is likely that funding for the 75-25 and 50-50 cost share program will be exhausted. However, the Joint-Use Program still has funding and will remain an option for a few more years. Please reach out to your Water Manager to discuss any potential Joint-Use projects for next year.

Rangewide Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse Survey Project Recognized with an Award

The Inaugural Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse Rangewide Survey Project was recognized with an Outstanding Environmental Project Award at the biennial State of the San Francisco Estuary conference held on May 28-29, 2024 at the Oakland Scottish Rite Center. In the past 50 years since it was declared a federal and state endangered species, surveys of the population of Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse in the San Francisco estuary (where it is endemic) have never been coordinated across its entire range. Survey methods have often varied over the years, and results from surveys conducted at several sites in different seasons and years are not directly comparable. In 2021, the SMHM Working Group initiated planning for the first annual rangewide survey with the support of grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The surveys included deploying trapping grids to obtain live captures and setting out bait stations to use dropping samples to determine presence and absence with recently developed eDNA analyses.



The survey was postponed in 2021 due to Covid-19 fieldwork restrictions, but in 2022, the inaugural effort was completed by the team of 70 dedicated biologists conducting surveys throughout the range. The survey was led by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, WRA, Inc., and the Suisun Resource Conservation District with the assistance of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, East Bay Regional Parks, U. C. Davis and numerous other partner organizations. Analyses of the large dataset that was collected are still ongoing, but the information from the survey will be used to highlight the most important areas where this species is distributed in the estuary. The findings from this survey and subsequent data analyses will provide critical information that will contribute to their recovery plan. It also will allow scientists to advise land managers to guide wetland enhancement and restoration efforts in a more efficient way to benefit the SMHM, increase resiliency of existing populations, and improve the estuary food web. A final goal of the study will be to create a long-term monitoring strategy to guide conservation management and improve SMHM resilience to climate change threats.

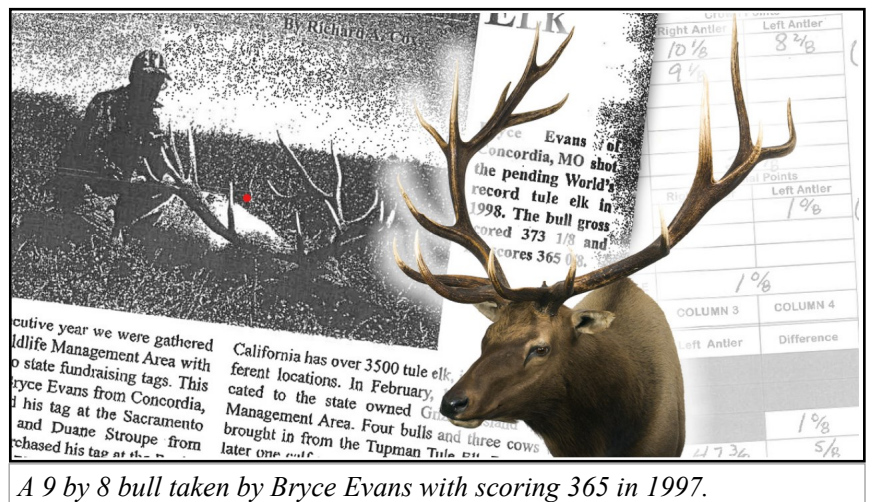


The first attempts to relocate elk was with a “rodeo technique” that resulted in high mortality from the translocation process. The rodeo technique was a capture method involving riders on horseback with capture ropes. The method caused the large animals a great deal of stress and overheating issues, and it ultimately killed many of the animals before they were released in new environments. Sequoia National Park was among the first to be chosen as a site to have quality habitat for a herd, and 21 animals were successfully moved there, but they did not adapt well and died out by 1926.



Drawing from 1848 depicting large herds of elk crossing the Carquinez Straits near Suisun Marsh.

By that time, many other relocation projects had been attempted but most ended unsuccessfully. However, 270 animals were translocated to 24 locations successfully, and today, 22 of these 24 locations support herds. GIWA received 4 bulls and 3 cows from Tupman Tule Elk State Reserve in Kern County and a yearling cow from Owens Valley in February 1977 and 1978. The area then received a bull, cow, and calf in 1979, and by 1985, the population exceeded 100 animals. The population grew so quickly that in 1988, the Grizzly Island Tule Elk Management Plan was created that included maintaining a population of 50 –70 animals. After a handful of individuals was killed after ingesting poison hemlock, the management plan was revised in 1992 to support a herd of 300 individuals and establishing a target bull-to-cow ratio and minimum calf recruitment rate.



A 9 by 8 bull taken by Bryce Evans with scoring 365 in 1997.

Grizzly Island Hunts

Currently, there are over 5,700 Tule elk in California, and about 300 make up the GIWA herd. The GIWA herd is managed to meet the target population goals through an annual management harvest. Hunting information gathered by CDFW from 1989 to 2023 indicated that the elk herd on Grizzly Island supports some of the heaviest and healthiest animals in the state. In fact, GIWA has 3 animals in the Boone and Crockett’s record book reported as some of the biggest Tule elk in history. Boone and Crockett scores are based on the growth of their antlers which can give clues to the animal’s genetics, health, and ranking. One of these Tule elk was awarded a score of 365 in 1997, a second was scored 365 in 2022, and in 1990, a third animal was scored with a 351. [The Tule Elk, Cont. on Pg. 5]

[The Tule Elk, Cont. from Pg. 4]

The Tule elk bulls on Grizzly Island seem to be the largest and healthiest in northern California which is why so many big game hunters apply for Tule elk hunts at GIWA. One GIWA tag is sold in an auction to the highest bidder every hunting season with the goal of using the proceeds to benefit big game management in California.

The GIWA tag is valid for one bull elk with a hunting period of 30 days starting on the first Saturday in August. The tag does not require the purchaser to be a resident in California and can be designated by the purchaser to any licensed hunter. The 2023 California Grizzly Island Elk Tag was sold to private individual

for \$106,000 dollars, while the 2024 tag sold for \$150,000 dollars. The tags typically result in harvest of a large Tule elk bull, and in 2023, the bull that was harvested ranked as the new Tule elk muzzleloader world record with a score of 362.



A photo of a large Tule elk on Grizzly Island Wildlife Area taking refuge in Closed Zone- Pond 12.

2024 Hunting Season

The general elk hunting season at GIWA start in the middle of August and runs through early September encompassing 13 4-day hunting periods. Each period allocates a certain number of tags for 2 to 6 animals depending on whether the hunt is geared for females, young males, or adult males. Hunts involving adult branched-antler males typically are the hardest to obtain, even with maximum hunter preference points. However once drawn, many hunters are successful and typically harvest a large animal that supplies them with 300-500 pounds of meat. Hunters are welcomed to camp on GIWA for morning and late evening hunting. At the time of the hunt, GIWA staff are available to help transport the harvested animal from field, bring the animal to elk camp to be hung and prepared for the travel home. Harvesting an elk from GIWA is extraordinary opportunity and expanding one! CDFW has announced that the state will be adding a few more hunts this year to help maintain the population on the wildlife area at a stable number. The new hunts will include a few more bull tags and will occur at the end of September. A recent survey indicated the wildlife area's elk population of 300 animals. The population estimate supported a few more tags to which a CDFW biologist advise the state on raising the elk hunting opportunity. The state adopted the additional tags for the hunting season 2024. For information on the new elk tags at Grizzly Island, please visit <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Hunting/Elk>.



GRIZZLY ISLAND WILDLIFE AREA UPDATES



- A new pump has been installed near the GI-WA shop area that can direct water to 3 different wetlands including Pond 15. Repairs on another pump near Check Station Lane and the bottom of Pond 15 has allowed Pond 15 and 16 to drain. Repairs were needed after the pump burned during the wildfire in October 2019.
- Island Slough Unit, a 525-acre wetland, received a new pump to make drainage of the parcel more efficient. Repairs at Island Slough's fishing dock were completed, and the dock was reopened to fishermen in the spring.
- The New Land Units, formally known as Long Point West Club and Bent Barrel, have begun maintenance work to expand GIWA waterfowl hunting units.
- After being deemed unsafe and unstable with repairs, work at the Joice Island Bridge was completed in May 2024 to restore full access.
- After 28 years of service, Shawn Overton, GIWA's habitat supervisor retired in October 2023. Randy Weinrich has now filled the position as the area manager.
- Larry Wyckoff, GIWA's senior supervisor retired in February 2023, and Lauren Barthman-Thompson has now filled that position.
- White Sturgeon is now a candidate for listing as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act. The fishing season for White Sturgeon closed on July 11th.



SALINITY CONTROL GATES OPERATE ALL SUMMER

For those clubs who want to keep water on their wetlands all summer or would like to flood up early the Suisun Marsh Salinity Control Gates will be in operation and will provide lower salinities than that would normally be seen in the interior Marsh from July-October 2024. Gate operations follow the Delta Smelt Summer Fall Habitat Action (SFHA), a requirement of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Incidental Take Permit issued to the Department of Water Resources for State Water Project operations. The operational action are aimed at improving habitat and food for Delta Smelt during the summer and fall months following the "Above Normal" water year for 2024. Therefore, the flashboards on the salinities control gates will remain closed and the boat lock will be in operation during that period. Any boat traffic moving through Montezuma Slough past the control gates will need to use the boat locks which are open to boat traffic between the hours of 7:00 AM and 5:00 PM.



Wilson's Snipe
Gallinago delicata

- Solitary creature with eyes set so far back on its head, it can see almost as well as behind as in front and to the sides and can fly at speeds of up to 60 mph
- Males performs "winnowing" display at night, where they fly in high circles while making shallow dives and during the points of the dive, vibration of outer tails feathers will produce a hollow whinnying sound
- When offsprings are ready to fledge, the males takes the 2 oldest fledging, while the mother takes the younger fledglings
- Wilson's Snipe pectoral muscles, the portion of the bird breast meat, makes up nearly a quarter of the bird's weight
- The word "sniper" originated in the 1700s among British soldiers in India who hunted snipe as a game



Suisun Conservation Fund's 20th Annual Shoot and Social Fundraiser

Sporting Clays Shoot, Steak BBQ Lunch, Raffle, and Auction

"Come Sharpen Your Shooting Eye for the Upcoming Season!"

All proceeds to benefit SRCD Landowners



Friday, July 26 @ 9AM-3PM

Sign-Up: 9AM-10AM

Shoot: 10AM-12PM

Lunch, Auction, Raffle: 12:30PM-2:00PM

Birds Landing Hunting Preserve and Sporting Clays

Cost \$100.00 per Person

The organizing committee is actively soliciting volunteers, donations of cash, auction, and raffle prizes

For more information contact: SRCD @ (707) 425-9302, SRCD@SuisunRCD.org,
Or John Takekawa 707-631-1402, jtakekawa@suisunrcd.org

Land Of The West Wind
SRCD Newsletter

2544 Grizzly Island Road
Suisun CA 94585

Address Correction Requested

PRESORTED NONPROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
SUISUN, CA 94585
PERMIT NO. 124



Address Correction Requested

— Suisun Conservation Fund's 20th Annual Shoot & Social Fundraiser —

Please RSVP by Monday, July 22nd, 2024

I would like to attend the SCF 19th Annual Shoot & Social Fundraiser on **Friday, July 26th 2024.**

How many _____ at \$100.00 per person. I have included a tax deductible cash donation of \$ _____.

Please contact me for an auction or raffle item:

Email SRCD@suisunrcd.org or call (707) 425-9302 for more information.

Make check payable to Suisun Conservation Fund and mail to:

Suisun Conservation Fund
2544 Grizzly Island Road
Suisun, CA 94585-9539

Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____

The Suisun Conservation Fund is a 501©(3) organization establish exclusively to support the conservation work of the Suisun Resource Conservation District.