

# Land of the West Wind

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Suisun Marsh is renowned for its wetlands and waterfowl populations as well as a rich diversity of plants and animals found in the brackish zone of the San Francisco estuary where the inflow of marine salt water meets the freshwater river outflow of the Central Valley. Over the past two centuries, development in the region for urbanization, farming, and waterfowl management has resulted in diking off much of the historical tidal wetlands from the natural flow of tidal waters. In the past few decades, restoring tidal flows to wetlands has been prioritized to benefit habitats for declining native fish populations. However, recent UC Davis studies have shown that the seasonally managed wetlands produce invertebrates consumed by fish, indicating that a mix of tidal and seasonally managed wetland types may be beneficial for fish in Suisun Marsh.

The multi-agency, 30-year Suisun Marsh Habitat Management, Preservation, and Restoration Plan or Suisun Marsh Plan (SMP) was completed in 2014 that established regional goals of enhancing 44,000-46,000 acres of seasonally managed wetlands and restoration of 5,000-7,000 acres of tidal wetlands. The goal of the tidal wetland restoration was to support the implementation of the Tidal Marsh Recovery Plan and contribute to the recovery of native endangered fish species and especially Chinook Salmon and Delta and Longfin Smelt as well as supporting other endangered species like the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse, California Ridgway's Rails, and rare native plants. The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Department of Water Resources (DWR), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Delta Stewardship Council (DSC), and Suisun Resource Conservation District (SRCD) were principal agencies to the agreement.

In the first decade (2014-2024), the agencies met the SMP goal of restoring about a third of the intended tidal wetland acreage. Restoration efforts have restored 1,937 acres in Suisun Marsh to tidal inundation that are described in DWR's 2024 Suisun Marsh Tidal Restoration Implementation Status Report (see Map), and results from the first 10 years are summarized starting on Page 4.

[*Tidal Restoration,* Cont. on Pg. 4]

#### Land of the West Wind

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

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SRCD's board meetings are the 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.



### Comings and Goings at the Suisun Resource Conservation District

We are very pleased to introduce the newest SRCD Board Member, Mr. Dick Vanderkous. Dick will chair the SRCD Finance subcommittee of the Board of Directors. Dick was born in Amsterdam and came to Martinez, CA when he was 5 years old. He later attended college in Oregon on a swim scholarship and was a Staff Sargeant in the California National Guard. He worked in engineering with Contra Costa County, established several businesses, and was a Founder and Director of John Muir National Bank. He is a wine enthusiast and built and owns Solitude Vineyards.



A neighbor first introduced Dick to hunting at 8 years of age, and it remains his passion today. He has hunted ducks in the Marsh for over 60 years from Grizzly Bay to Gibson's Horseshoe (established by State Senator Luther Gibson). Dick is the oldest living life member of the Martinez Gun Club. He is a member and major donor at California Waterfowl Association (CWA), Ducks Unlimited, North America Elk Foundation, Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation, and Nevada Bighorns Unlimited. His goal is to keep Suisun Marsh landowners advised to the programs available to them and to ensure this lifestyle of waterfowl conservation continues for the next generation.

It is with great sadness that we regret to inform our readers of the passing of long-time SRCD Board Member, Mr. Arnold Lenk. Arnie passed away on March 20<sup>th</sup> in Walnut Creek after a 2-year battle with Parkinson's disease. Arnie served as a SRCD Director for almost 24 years, starting in June of 1999 and retiring in April of 2023. He served as the Chair of the SRCD Agency Committee and was a lifelong supporter of CWA and Ducks Unlimited.

Arnie was born on October 16, 1936, in Richmond, California. He started hunting in Suisun Marsh with his father at the age of 9 years old, and he continued hunting in

the Marsh for over 70 years. He belonged to many duck clubs in the Marsh over the years, including Wheeler Island Gun Club and Rich Island Duck Club. It is safe to say that no one loved Suisun Marsh more than Arnie -- he was an unwavering advocate for preservation of the Marsh. He promoted policies to ensure the wetland and wildlife resources in the Marsh were protected and enhanced through SRCD programs and private landowner stewardship. His leadership and friendship will be sorely missed. Arnie is survived by his wife Charlene, 8 kids, 19 Grandkids, and 11 great grandkids.



### **Controlling Wetland Damage Caused By Non-native Mute Swans**

On February 18, 2025, Jeff Gonzalez (R-Coachella), assembly member and Vice Chair of the Water Parks and Wildlife Committee proposed Assembly Bill (AB) 764 to allow landowners and hunters with a valid license to take Mute Swans, *Cygnus olor*. AB 764 would add this invasive, non-native bird to the list of exotic non-game birds that can be legally taken for essential management control. If passed, the act would amend Sections 3801 of the Fish and Game Code relating to wildlife and would add Mute Swans as the third species on the list of exotic non-game birds. The list current includes the English or House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus* and the European Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*.

Like House Sparrows and European Starlings, Mute Swans are a non-native species from Europe, and they are very aggressive and outcompete most native waterfowl species. The presence of Mute Swans often leads to lower ecosystem diversity and lower wetland productivity. Mute Swans typically feed by reaching down to uproot submerged vegetation, creating deep ponds that prevents smaller native species from obtaining food resources. Their presence in the United States began as early as the 1800s when importation of many nonnatives like the Mute Swan was acceptable, and they gained popularity as ornamental animals on estates of the wealthy. Famous icons like John D. Rockefeller and Henry Ford imported hundreds of Mute Swans for their aesthetic value. By the late 1900s, the demand for Mute Swans increased their distribution to public parks, ponds, and even well-established zoos like New York City's Central Park and the Philadelphia Zoo. The bird's large size, pure white plumage, and



The non-native Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*. Distinguishing traits include bright orange bill with a black knob, a long "S"-shaped neck and a black face patch.

long curved necks became associated with elegance and royalty, making them a status of wealth. Even today, the public has a positive view of Mute Swans as beautiful birds despite their destructive behavior and the negative consequences of their activities to the environments and native species in the United States.

Unfortunately, many populations of the Mute Swans have escaped captivity or in some cases were intentionally released, resulting in the rapid expansion of feral populations. Over time, large populations have become established in several areas, and there are now well over 22,000 Mute Swans in the United States. Mute Swans have continued to expand their range into new wetlands with populations increasing in the Great Lakes region and along the West Coast including in the Suisun Marsh and Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. Since they are nonmigratory and breed locally, as their numbers increase in abundance, it is expected that the negative consequences of their aggressive behavior and foraging habits will lead to devastating outcomes for Suisun Marsh wetlands.

A prime example of the species' influence on wetlands can be observed in the Great Lakes where Mute Swans have been found to reduce submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) biomass by up to 95% at sites with water depths between 6"-18". SAV plays a vital role in the functioning of freshwater ecosystems and can promote healthy habitat for fish and invertebrates. A 95% reduction in SAV resulting from the presence of Mute Swans will degrade fish and invertebrates' communities which are key food resources for residential and migrating waterfowl. Conservation organizations that study the negative effects of Mute Swan populations in the Great Lakes support lethal control and encourage managers to have an open dialogue with stakeholders and private property owners regarding the removal of this non-native species.

[*Mute Swans*, Cont. on Pg. 6]



In 2007, the first tidal restoration project that preceded the SMP was implemented in the eastern region of Suisun Marsh at the Blacklock Duck Club #604. Levees of this property were breached at 3 sites. However, after breaching, this site was colonized by dense beds of invasive common reed *Phragmites australis*, and this early restoration effort identified the problem that invasive plants may degrade the future value of restored tidal wetlands for fish habitats. Controlling this invasive grass has become a major concern for the agencies, and the Blacklock Tidal Restoration has been used as a site to test possible control efforts.

In 2019, the 15-acre Lower Spring Branch Creek Restoration was completed on the 2,070-acre Rush Ranch property. A berm was lowered and a culvert was enlarged on the creek to allow creation of a new tidal slough and restore hydrological flow to the site. In the fall of 2019, the Tule Red Tidal Restoration Project was breached on the former Grizzly King Gun Club #513 located on the western edge of CDFW's Grizzly Island Wildlife Area. A single breach was made in the northwest corner opening the parcel to tidal flows from Suisun Bay. The project restored 420 acres of tidal wetlands funded by DWR and the State and Federal Contractors Water Agency. Westervelt Ecological Services originally acquired the land (except for 66 acres which was already owned by CDFW) and led the restoration work which was transferred to DWR ownership in 2021.

In 2020, Wings Landing Duck Club #211 was breached at 3 sites to restore tidal waters to 267 acres. The restoration was a joint effort between DWR and the Natural Resources Group beginning in 2017 with planning and transfer of the property to DWR. Wings Landing is located adjacent to CDFW's Peytonia Ecological Reserve, the Hill Slough Restoration Area, and Solano Land Trust's Rush Ranch property. It is also at the mouth of 2 very small sloughs, Peytonia and Boynton Slough, and opening this parcel to tidal inundation was particularly important for water quality benefits, increasing tidal mixing, and reducing low dissolved oxygen levels.

In 2021, the Arnold Slough Tidal Restoration was completed. DWR acquired 263 acres of land in 2017 at Arnold Slough adjacent to Blacklock and breached it at 3 sites. The Arnold Slough Restoration provides 134 acres of tidal habitats that contribute towards the SMP goal.

[Tidal Restoration, Cont. on Pg. 5]

[Tidal Restoration, Cont. from Pg. 4]

Also in 2021, the CDFW Hill Slough Wildlife Area was breached to tidal action. The area consisted of 850 acres on the east and west of Grizzly Island Road, but an additional 629 acres were restored to tidal action.

In 2022, the DWR Bradmoor Island Restoration in the northeastern Marsh was completed with 5 breaches. DWR secured Overlook Duck Club #322 in 2013, Flying D Duck Club # 329 in 2015, and Wildwings Duck Club #330 in 2017. Bradmoor Island has one of the largest upland hill habitats within the Marsh and provides areas for native grasses and other endemic plants.

In 2023, Potrero Hills Gun Club #303 was proposed to DWR for tidal restoration by Westervelt Ecological Services. Located at the northeast corner of the Marsh at the terminus of Luco Slough, hydrodynamic modeling indicated that with restoration there could be effects to downstream exterior levees from increased tidal velocities and scour. Thus, the restoration project was withdrawn.



The remaining tidal restoration projects are either under construction or in the planning phase. DWR acquired Fin and Feather Club #915 and Dante Farms #910 on Chipps Island (664 acres) for restoration that is currently under construction. An additional restoration of 80 acres is being planned for the Goat Island Marsh on Rush Ranch in the next 2-3 years.







- → For the 2024-2025 waterfowl season, Grizzly Island Wildlife Area (GIWA) had over 5,017 hunter who harvested 10,078 ducks and 91 geese. The average was 2.01 birds per hunter.
- → The top five species for last year season were 2,908- Northern Shoveler, 2,552- American Wigeon, 2,908- Green-Winged Teal, 828- Mallard and 485- Gadwall.
- → GIWA welcomed a higher number of wild harvested ring-necked pheasants than in several previous years. A total of 87 birds were harvested from the GIWA, and 51 of those birds were wild while 36 were planted birds. In 2023, 26 wild birds and 55 planted birds were harvested totaling 81 birds for the season. GIWA also welcomed a higher pheasant hunter turnout with 19 more pheasant-only hunters than in 2023.
- → Joice Island Wild Pig Hunts are in full swing on the weekends through the end of May with 52 opportunities to harvest a wild pig with 23 pigs harvested in 2022.
- → GIWA staff are currently finishing ditch cleaning, have began mowing levees and spraying noxious weeds.
- → California Ridgeway's Rails surveys have been completed for the season. A handful of other rail species have been heard and documented.

Green Sturgeon — Acipenser medirostris

Research studies have already highlighted how crucial it is to apply more intensive measures to protect wetlands near urbanized locations. Many have stated that native biodiversity decreases along an urban disturbance gradient, and Mute Swans may be keying in on disturbed sites over more pristine ones, resulting in an increasing urban population.

Many organizations are also in support implementing culling practices such as applying a thin layer of vegetable oil around eggs of Mute Swans to prevent reproduction. Mute Swans have high reproductive rates and strong family bonds, implementing culling measures and other human intervention are needed to slow the a growth rate of feral populations of Mute Swans. While removing young and adults is the most effective way to control the Mute Swan populations, this may be difficult to achieve during certain times of the year. *Phragmites* control efforts also may help to deter the species, because Mute Swans have a preference for nesting material from *Phragmites australis*, a non -native invasive plant that needs to be controlled.

Without AB 764, controlling the population of Mute Swans will be more difficult, and they will continue to increase their numbers because they have a competitive advantages and lack of natural predators. The species has the ability to alter habits and community composition throughout Suisun Marsh and managing invasive species requires a year-round commitment to their control and an early detection, rapid response approach.



Creen Sturgeon are a federally threatened species, so no take of any kind is permitted.\*\*

<sup>^^</sup> The Green Sturgeon is 1 of the 27 sturgeon species found in the Northern Hemisphere and is 1 of the 2 species that reside on the West Coast.

\*\*Rather than bone, their internal skeleton is mostly made of cartilage. On its head, there are thick bony plates with 5 rows of enlarged scales called scutes all along the body. The tail fin is heteroceral with an upper lobe is larger than the lower, while its mostly is to add the body with a scale scale scale of the body.

mouth is toothless, with four fleshy barbels and protractile lips.

\*\*The Green Sturgeon represents a highly specialized offshoot of ancestral Chondrosteans that were most numerous and possessed the greatest diversity 252 million years ago.

\*\*As a bottom feeder, the species uses their tactile barbels in search of small invertebrates and fishes. Despite their diet, the species can still weigh up too 350 lbs and be over 7ft long.





# YOU ARE INVITED TO A LOCAL EVENT

42nd annual Suisun Marsh Field Day Saturday, June 7, 2025 Grizzly Ranch 4179 Van Sickle Rd., Suisun City CA 94585

FREE ADMISSION // KIDS EVENT

PRE-ORDER ONLY! Order by May 30th to receive a New York Steak lunch with sides, salad & drink for \$40

Birrieria Gera Food Truck & Hot Dog lunches are available the day of the event for purchase.



#### "Kill it & Grill it" Raffle

\$50 per Ticket ~ Only 150 Tickets Available One lucky winner will receive a Franchi Momentum Elite 6.5 PRC, Traeger Tailgater BBQ, Yeti Tundra Haul Cooler, Yeti GoBox60, Vortex HD-20-60x85 Spotting Scope AND a pair of Vortex HD 15x60 Binoculars. Need not be present to win

Have fun while making a positive impact, knowing your support tackles the California issues you care about!

Reserve with the QR code





For more info, contact: Orlando at (916) 719-1993 Zach at (925) 200-3606 Jeff at (530) 588-3765



<u>Activities</u> Youth Duck Calling Contest Youth Shooting & Duck Banding Youth Art Projects Bounce Houses Vendors Live Auction Raffles & Games PFDA Decoy Rig Competition

All Fundraising Dollars Stay In Our State to Benefit Waterfowl and Wetlands



## **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!!** If interested, please contact

f interested, please contact Marina at (562) 346– 8706





#### **2025 Spring Intake Gate Restrictions**

A friendly reminder to all landowners of the 2025 gate restrictions for the Delta and Longfin Smelt reproductive period. Any landowner diverting water from designated sloughs (see map) shall obey unscreened water diversion restrictions described in the Army Corps of Engineers Regional General Permit No. 2012-00258N and the USFWS Biological Opinion intake capacity restriction including 20% capacity between April 1 and May 31.

Suisun Resources Conservation District and California Department of Fish and Wildlife staff will be checking all intake gates in the restriction zones by boat during the monitoring period. If there are any questions regarding these restrictions, contact the SRCD office at (707) 425-9302 and speak with Steven Chappell.

