



Land of the West Wind

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Volume 26 Issue II

NESTING DUCKS WITHIN THE SUISUN MARSH

By: Kathy Su (CDFW) and Brock Riggs (SRCD)



Figure 1. Biologists drive a pair of ATV's through the nesting fields on Grizzly Island Wildlife Area to locate nesting hens.

The Suisun Marsh stands as one of the largest and most vital estuarine marshes in the western United States, providing essential habitat for waterfowl along the Pacific Flyway. This habitat is particularly significant not only during migration and wintering periods but also throughout the breeding season. With California having lost 91% of its historical wetland habitat by 1980 (Dahl, 1990), the Suisun Marsh has become critical for nesting birds, hosting one of the state's highest nest densities of breeding dabbling ducks.

Among the various species that breed in the Suisun Marsh, Mallards, Gadwall, and Cinnamon Teal are the most prevalent. Each species exhibits unique breeding dynamics, characterized by variations in nest initiation, clutch size, and incubation periods. For instance, Mallards typically begin nesting earlier than their counterparts, with a median initiation date of April 26th, while Gadwall start their nesting nearly two weeks later (Hartman et al., 2023). This staggered timing underscores the adaptability of these species to their environment.



Figure 2. The Grizzly Island Wildlife Area dedicated upland fields are centered within the Suisun Marsh, providing nesting waterfowl ample habitat to raise their broods.

Environmental factors significantly influence breeding success in the marsh, as these opportunistic breeders adjust their nesting strategies in response to fluctuating conditions. Key elements such as upland nesting cover, wetland availability, food resources, predation risks, and weather patterns can determine the outcomes of their breeding efforts. Recent studies by the U.S. Geological Survey have revealed that nests located near flooded wetlands and in areas of low salinity experience higher

[*Nesting Ducks*, Cont. on Pg. 4]

Land of the West Wind

Quarterly Newsletter
Suisun Resource Conservation District
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**SRCD's Board Meetings are on 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 pleased to introduce the newest Suisun Resource Conservation District (SRCD) Water Manager, Brock Riggs. Brock began working with waterfowl in the Suisun Marsh as a waterfowl banding technician in 2017 for the USGS. Through his time as a banding technician, he spent time collaborating with CDFW and CWA on banding and GPS telemetry marking projects in order to study nesting habits, migratory pathways, and body conditions of mallards, gadwall, cinnamon teal, and northern pintail. Brock also spent time as a Junior Specialist at UC Davis researching Avian Influenza within waterfowl and its viability in managed wetlands. Brock obtained his Bachelor's Degree in Biology at California State University, Stanislaus in 2021. He is currently finishing his Master's Degree at UC Davis in Animal Biology with a thesis on remote spatial tracking of waterfowl and the spread of Avian Influenza. Brock has an ongoing passion for waterfowl, and a background in hunting in the Suisun Marsh. He is excited to help landowners throughout the Marsh achieve their management goals and sustain wildlife in the region.



After nearly seven years with SRCD, Staff Biologist Jesirae Collins, is leaving to become the new Shark/Aquarium Department Supervisor at Six Flags. Jesirae was integral to SRCD's mission of supporting landowners in the Marsh. Her contributions included developing and managing each club's Individual Management



Plans, writing grants to support landowners and habitat work, maintaining the SRCD website, and organizing our Landowner Workshops. Her remarkable work ethic and ability to tackle any challenge made her an invaluable member of the team. Working with her was a pleasure and the staff will miss Jesirae dearly. We wish her all the best in her new position. Thank you, Jes, for everything you have done for SRCD and the Suisun Marsh!

SRCD Events - Suisun Marsh Spring Landowner Workshop



Figure 1. Attendees of the Suisun Marsh Spring Landowner Workshop

The 2026 Suisun Resource Conservation District Spring Landowner Workshop was a great success, with over 100 attendees, including private landowners and representatives from the California Waterfowl Association, Ducks Unlimited, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Department of Water Resources. Participants received updates on the work and scientific efforts underway in the Suisun Marsh.

During the workshop, SRCD staff provided program updates, application deadline reminders, and insights into potential future programs. Representatives from CDFW shared information on the nutria management program, Wildlife Area management plans, and provided a sensitive plant species training to landowners. CWA staff updated attendees on the progress of the Pacific Flyway Center and their ongoing research to study and protect waterfowl populations. DU provided updates on potential wetland enhancement grant opportunities.

If you were unable to attend the workshop or would like to revisit any of the presentations, a recording of the event is available on the SRCD website on the “Resources” tab, listed under “Landowner Information.”

SRCD would like to extend our gratitude to Pete Smith for hosting the event and to the Suisun Conservation Fund for sponsoring it. We look forward to seeing everyone at the next Suisun Marsh Spring Landowner Workshop in 2027.



SUISUN RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT
SUISUN MARSH SPRING LANDOWNER WORKSHOP
 FP Smith Equipment, 3190 Ramsey Road, Fairfield, CA
 and
 Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83526554679>
 April 22, 2026

8:30 to 8:50	Sign In - <i>Coffee and Pastries</i>
8:50 to 9:00	Welcome - <i>Steve Chappell, SRCD</i>
9:00 to 9:15	SRCD Program Updates and Application Deadlines - <i>Jeff Taylor, SRCD</i>
9:15 to 9:30	Sensitive Species Permit Requirements and Training - <i>Dajanae Stitts, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife</i>
9:30 to 9:45	GIWA and Hill Slough Land Management Plans - <i>Alyssa Davidge, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife</i>
9:45 to 10:00	Nutria Program Updates - <i>Allison Herrera, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife</i>
10:00 to 10:15	DU and NAWCA Updates - <i>Aaron Will, Ducks Unlimited</i>
10:15 to 10:20	Future Levee Maintenance Program? - <i>Steve Chappell, SRCD</i>
10:20 to 10:45	Legislative Updates - <i>Bill Gaines, Bill Gaines & Associates</i>
10:45 to 11:00	BREAK
11:00 to 11:15	Bird Returns - Program Successes and Status Updates - <i>Bobby Walsh, Point Blue & Ashley Seufzer, Audubon</i>
11:15 to 11:25	Pacific Flyway Center and CWA Updates - <i>Robert Eddings, California Waterfowl Association</i>
11:15 to 11:30	Introduction to CWA's New Science Director - <i>Dr. Cory Overton, California Waterfowl Association</i>
11:30 to 11:45	Breeding Waterfowl Surveys and Emerging Technologies - <i>Rich Cain, University of California Davis</i>
11:45 to 12:15	Phragmites Program - Drone Demo - <i>Desmond Mackell, SRCD</i>
12:15 to 1:30	LUNCH - <i>Supported by the Suisun Conservation Fund</i>

Thanks to Pete Smith and the Suisun Conservation Fund for sponsoring this event

Figure 2. Agenda from the Suisun Marsh Spring Landowner Workshop

success rates and improved brood survival (Peterson et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of maintaining fresh, flooded habitats close to upland nesting areas.

Upland vegetation plays a crucial role in providing nesting cover for hens, enabling them to conceal their nests and protect their young from predators. While there are several areas within the Suisun Marsh with suitable habitat, the dedicated upland fields at Grizzly Island Wildlife Area have historically produced a high number of waterfowl nests. Their central location, surrounded by wetland areas, offers excellent concealment and convenient access to water once the ducklings hatch.

Due to the significance of these upland fields, Grizzly Island Wildlife Area has become a focal point for scientific research on breeding waterfowl in California. To monitor waterfowl population trends and understand their habitat needs better, the U.S. Geological Survey conducts annual nest searches in this area. This process involves the use of two ATVs pulling a long rope across the upland vegetation; when a hen is flushed from her nest, it is marked for observation throughout the incubation period until hatching occurs.

Preliminary results from this year’s nest searches indicate a promising breeding season, with 159 active waterfowl nests discovered—103 belonging to Mallards and 56 to Gadwalls. Nest vegetation typically features tall wheatgrass and rye grasses. Other plants commonly used for nesting cover include pickleweed, vetch, thistles, and radish.

With the combination of mild summer temperatures, a wet spring, and low salinity levels throughout the Marsh, the breeding season for the resident waterfowl population appears to be thriving. Broods of various ages, sizes, and species are being observed across both state lands and private properties throughout the Suisun Marsh, illustrating the ongoing importance of this vital habitat for waterfowl.



Figure 3. A visual of an active mallard nest.

Species	Median Initiation Date	Average Clutch Size	Incubation Period
Mallard	April 26th	9.6 eggs	26-28 days
Gadwall	May 9th	10.6 eggs	24-27 days
Cinnamon Teal	April 30th	11.1 eggs	21-25 days

Table 1. Nest initiation dates, average clutch sizes, and incubation periods of the three most prominent breeding waterfowl species within the Suisun Marsh (Hartman et al., Bellrose).

Citations:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology. (2020). *Birds of the World species accounts* (Mallard, Gadwall, and Cinnamon Teal). In S. M. Billerman (Ed.), *Birds of the World*. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. <https://birdsoftheworld.org>

Dahl, T. E. 1990 *Wetlands Losses in the United States 1780’s to 1980’s*. U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington D.C. 21 pp.

Hartman, C. A., Ackerman, J. T., Peterson, S. H., Fettig, B., Casazza, M. L., & Herzog, M. P. (2023). *Nest attendance, incubation constancy, and onset of incubation in dabbling ducks*. PLOS ONE, 18(5), e0286151. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0286151>

Peterson, S. H., Acketman, J. T., Hartman, C. A., Greenwalt, A. C., Casazza, M. L., & Herzog, M. P. (2024). *Duckling survival increased with availability of flooded wetland habitat and decreased with salinity concentrations in a brackish marsh*. Ornithological Applications, 126(3). <https://doi.org/10.1093/ornithapp/duae017>

2026 - 2027 Waterfowl Hunting Regulations

The following is a summary of 2026-2027 regulations. Please refer to the Fish and Game Commission's website for the actual language adopted on June 12th, 2026. In California, the Balance of the State Zone's regular season starts on October 24th, 2026 and ends on January 31st, 2027. This zone, including the Suisun Marsh, has a 7-duck daily limit that can include: 7 mallards (2 hens), 3 pintail, 2 canvasback, 2 redheads, 2 scaup, and a goose bag limit of 30 birds (20 White, 10 Dark - *Only 6 White-fronts*).

Important Waterfowl Dates:

Oct 3rd-5th: Large Canada Goose Early Season

Oct 24th: Suisun Marsh Opening Day

Nov 7th: Scaup Season Opens

Nov 21st: Free Hunting Day

Dec 1st: Powered Spinning-Winged Decoys Opens

Jan 31st: Suisun Marsh Regular Season Ends

Jan 31st: Balance of State Goose Season Closes

Feb 6th-7th: Veterans and Active Military Personnel Waterfowl Hunting Days

Feb 13th-14th: Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days

Feb 20th-21st: Late Canada Goose Weekend

Feb 20th-24th: Late White-fronted Goose and White Goose Season

Upland Game Species Dates:

Mourning Dove Season: September 1st-15th & Nov 14th-Dec 28th (15 per day):

Snipe Season Oct 17th- Jan 31st (8 per day)

Ring-Necked Pheasant: Nov 14th-Dec 27th (2 males per day for the first two days of season; 3 males per day after)



Opening Day of Waterfowl Season Will Be October 24, 2026

Important Reminder for Clubs - Waterfowl Opening Weekend 2026-27

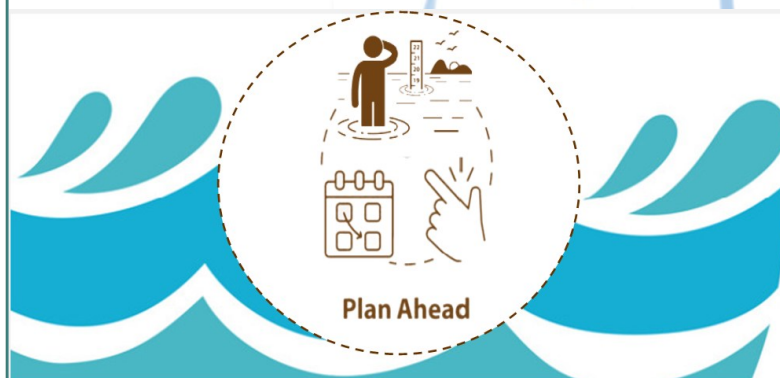
Water Management

- Plan any summer maintenance work to conclude before targeted flood dates.
- Engage with SRCD water managers to discuss flood dates, tide sets, and shoot level objectives.
- Sign your waivers with the Solano County Mosquito Abatement District (SCMAD) to be eligible for cost-share benefits and coordinate with SCMAD technicians to reduce treatment costs.
- Coordinate with club members and neighbors to ensure the desired water levels are reached by the fourth week of October.

General Recommendations

- Coordinate with neighbors, water managers, and SCMAD to manage mosquito production.
- Plan flooding around the best tide sets before the season begins.
- Proper planning and communication help ensure healthy wetlands and a better hunting experience.
- Pre-stage flood fighting materials at your club. Very large El Niño is forecasted for this fall/winter. Be prepared for heavy rains, strong winds, and high tides.

Be proactive, communicate, and plan ahead.



Grizzly Island Wildlife Area Tule Elk Hunt

Tule Elk (*Cervus canadensis nannodes*) have become a symbol of Grizzly Island and the Suisun Marsh. However, the now prominent figure was not always as prevalent as it is today.



After nearly going extinct due to extensive market hunting in the 1800's, there was no population within the Suisun Marsh. Relocation efforts began across California in 1905, and at Grizzly Island Wildlife Area in 1977. By 1985, the translocated animals had increased the GIWA population to over 100 Tule Elk. Due to the fast growing rate of the population, The Grizzly Island Tule Elk Management Plan was established in 1988.

The Grizzly Island Wildlife Area Tule Elk hunt began in 1989 as a way to manage the herd's population. As there are no natural predators present in the Suisun Marsh ecosystem for the Tule Elk, the hunt program is necessary to avoid many possible issues such as overpopulation, overgrazing, and the possible spread of diseases. The hunt is highly competitive within California's big game tag draws; hunters who are lucky enough to draw the highly sought-after tags are often successful. With Grizzly Island Wildlife Area being home to some of the healthiest, largest bulls in the state, hunters from across the country apply each year for the chance to harvest a potential record breaking bull.

The 2026 Grizzly Island Wildlife Area Tule Elk hunting season opens on August 1st and runs through September 25th. As a result, the wildlife area will be closed beginning July 27th to the general public. This year, there were 38 tags awarded, and hunts are again expected to be quite successful.



Northern Shoveler ~ *Spatula clypeata*

- The most recognizable feature of the northern shoveler is its "spoon-shaped" bill, which measures out to roughly 2.5 inches long.
- The shoveler's bill contains about 110 fine projections, called lamella, that act as a strainer for aquatic invertebrates, tiny crustaceans, and seeds from the water column.
- Northern Shovelers remain with their breeding partner longer than pairs of most other dabbling ducks, staying together from winter until late summer, just before migrating back south.
- The Northern Shoveler is most closely related to the Blue-winged Teal (*Spatula discors*) and Cinnamon Teal (*Spatula cyanoptera*). Cinnamon Teal, like the Northern Shoveler, are quite prominent in the Suisun Marsh.
- The oldest recorded Northern Shoveler was banded in Nevada in 1952. When found in California in 1969, he was at least 16 years and 7 months old.

Suisun Conservation Fund's 22nd Annual Shoot and Social Fundraiser

Sporting Clays Shoot, Steak BBQ, Raffle, and Auction

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

All proceeds to benefit SRCD Landowners



Friday, July 31st, 2026 @ 9AM - 3PM

Sign-Up: 9AM - 10AM

Shoot: 10AM - 12PM

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

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 or SRCD@SuisunRCD.org,
Or Desmond Mackell (707) 631-1402, DMackell@SuisunRCD.org

See other side

Land Of The West Wind
SRCD Newsletter

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Please share this flyer!!

Please RSVP by Friday, July 17th, 2026

I would like to attend the SCF 22nd Annual Shoot & Social Fundraiser on Friday, July 31st, 2026.

How many attendees at \$100.00 per person: _____

I would also like to include a tax-deductible cash donation of \$_____

Please contact me (707-631-1402, dmackell@suisunrcd.org) for an auction or raffle item donation

Make checks payable to: **Suisun Conservation Fund** & mail to: **SCF**
2544 Grizzly Island Rd.
Suisun, CA 94585-9539

Name_____ Phone_____ Email_____

Name_____ Phone_____ Email_____

Name_____ Phone_____ Email_____

Name_____ Phone_____ Email_____

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