

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Stone Lakes

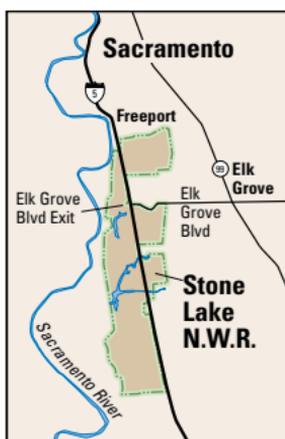
National Wildlife Refuge



*Stone Lakes Refuge
serves as an oasis
for migrating birds
and other wildlife
in California's
Central Valley.*



Nearby Yet A World Apart



Whether it's fall and flocks of geese are landing in wetlands and grasslands or spring, and warblers are foraging in tree-lined waterways, Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) protects wildlife in the midst of an urban setting in California's Central Valley.

Located just 12 miles from the state's capitol, the Stone Lakes area has three permanent lakes—Beach Lake, North Stone Lake, and South Stone Lake. These large bodies of water serve as magnets for fish and wildlife in the northern Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

The refuge is a part of a vast complex of seasonally flooded agricultural lands and natural managed wetlands that provides resting, feeding and resting habitat for thousands of birds migrating along the Pacific Flyway.

Area residents and public officials long recognized the need to preserve this open space for wildlife. In 1994, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) established Stone Lakes NWR as the 505th refuge in the National Wildlife Refuge System to protect these habitats from intensive agricultural development and urbanization.

North Stone Lake, with its associated marsh and woodland habitat



Experience It

Any season is a great time to visit Stone Lakes. The wildlife and plants have adapted to the sudden abundance of spring vegetation, the penetrating heat of summer and the “tule” fog and floods of winter. Refuge access is limited, but increasing, as more land is protected and the recreational program develops.

Fall



Greater yellowlegs

After months of no precipitation, rainfall and water pumped from waterways transform the landscape into flooded wetlands and wet meadows in time for the arrival of fall migrants.

Dunlins, black-bellied plovers and smaller shorebirds inhabit the shallow wetlands. The larger shorebirds, such as American avocets and greater yellow legs, feed in deeper water, depending on the length of their bills and legs.

Mallards, green-winged teal, and dozens of other waterfowl arrive, descending hundreds of birds at a time. Greater sandhill cranes also appear, foraging in the pastures and croplands.

Greater sandhill cranes



Winter

Flocks of greater white-fronted geese and Canada geese announce winter, filling the basin with their cackling and honking. Along with thousands of geese and ducks, shorebirds and sandhill cranes, they rest and feed on the seasonally flooded wetlands, grasslands and surrounding farmlands.



Great egret

Egrets and herons join in the action, commuting back and forth to construct nests in their refuge rookeries.

The skies are also alive with birds of prey, from Swainson's hawks to peregrine falcons. Flocks of white-crowned sparrows and gold finches feed and find cover in old fields bordering the tree-lined waterways.

Resident coyotes hunt the grasslands, river otters navigate slough waters and

California ground squirrels search for forgotten seeds. Winter rain fills depressions in the grasslands called vernal pools. Moisture awakens tiny organisms, including endangered fairy and tadpole shrimp, that will hatch in early spring.

Occasionally, prolonged winter storms flood the entire basin, stunning Interstate 5 travelers with a view of extensive wetlands brimming with waterfowl, reminiscent of how the area may have appeared a hundred years ago. Holding winter floodwater is good for the birds, offers important spawning habitat for fish, such as the threatened Sacramento splittail, and provides flood protection for the Sacramento region — one of the purposes of the refuge.

Tern over water



Experience It

Spring

Warmer weather evaporates water in the vernal pools, leaving colorful bands of goldfields, downingees and other unique plants. As the pools dry up, fairy shrimp complete their life cycle, laying thousands of eggs that remain dormant in the soil until the rains return.



Killdeer

The wetlands also begin to dry, where black-necked stilts, American avocets and other shorebirds make use of nesting islands and concentrated food. Green herons and American bitterns nest at ponds and lakes with dense stands of tules and cattails.

Trees and shrubs come alive with songbirds in hues of yellow, red and blue. Many migratory birds answer the ancient call to migrate to their northern breeding grounds.

The refuge offers special guided tours to a rookery where you can see double-crested cormorants, great blue herons and great egrets returning to the nest to feed their fuzzy-headed young.

Wood duck



Summer

Hérons, egrets and cormorants and a few waterfowl remain through the summer on lakes where water is still abundant.

Mallards



Songbirds are numerous along tree-lined waterways, from ash-throated flycatchers and loggerhead shrikes to blue grosbeaks and western meadowlarks.

Sheltered by the ground-level canopy of dried grasses, rodents, lizards and snakes travel a maze of hidden runways, retreating to their burrows to avoid the mid-day heat and predators. As the temperature climbs coyotes, blacktailed jack rabbits and other wildlife also limit their activity.

Insects – nature’s pollinators and recyclers – are also evident. Colorful beetles, butterflies and grasshoppers greet visitors along walking trails bordered by flowering elderberry shrubs, California hibiscus and sunflowers.

Swallowtail butterfly



A Rich History

The original inhabitants of this area were the Plains Miwok who made their camps along the lakes' shorelines, where they hunted and fished. Since there were no stones in the lakes, they baked mud into clay to make such necessities as fishing weights, cooking balls and ornaments. They constructed their homes from tules and wove intricate baskets from grasses growing along the waterways. Today, the refuge works with the modern-day Miwok to protect their cultural sites and provide native plants for traditional uses and environmental education.

The Lakes

The lakes of the Stone Lakes Basin were historically much larger and teemed with wildlife. Tule elk, grizzly bears, and other wildlife were once so plentiful that nearby locations were named for them, such as Elk Grove, Badger Creek and Grizzly Island.

The names of the lakes have changed over time. Some believe that the most recent name, Stone Lakes, came from a local landowner, Mr. Rockwell Stone, a former Sacramento resident and well-known San Franciscan during the mid-1800s.

Tundra swans



Stone Lakes Basin

The Stone Lakes Basin is located in the Cosumnes and Mokelumne River watersheds and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. Floodwaters from these river systems and the 180-square mile Morrison Creek watershed replenish the basin's large lakes, wetlands and riparian streams during winter storms. Extensive flooding caused by heavy winter rains and spring thaws was reduced by construction of the Sacramento River flood control system.

The Railroad

In 1910, Southern Pacific Railroad built an elevated railroad line that simultaneously divided and interconnected the basin lakes. The dirt for the elevated line came from a "borrow" channel that filled with water and formed a connection among the lakes. Pumps periodically drained the lakes, allowing the land to be cleared for crop cultivation. Today, this channel enables tidal influence to extend northward from the Delta.

Agriculture

Southern Sacramento County's agriculture has changed significantly in the last 15 years. It has shifted from grazing lands and corn, wheat and other grain crops that wildlife need to intensively farmed vineyards and housing developments, which

have little value for wildlife. Even with all of these changes in the area wildlife was still plentiful, providing an excellent opportunity to establish a national wildlife refuge to protect the remaining habitat for future generations.



Restore It

Home Improvement

Looking at the refuge today, even from a passing vehicle, travelers see renovated wetlands bordered by restored maturing trees. The view was different in the early 1900s, when there were fewer wetlands and much of the area's riparian corridors (streamside forest) had vanished.

To orchestrate this change, the Service worked with the community to identify a project area of 18,200 acres where it could cooperatively manage or acquire land from willing sellers. To finance these efforts, the refuge has raised millions of dollars in private, state, and federal grants.

Management Partners

Today the refuge includes over 4,000 acres that the Service owns or cooperatively manages with a number of partners within the refuge boundary, including the Sacramento County Regional Parks Recreation, and Open Space, Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District, and the California Departments of Transportation, Parks and Recreation, and Water Resources.

Long-billed dowitchers



Restoration

Restoration programs are transforming land that once lay fallow, or was intensively farmed, into productive grasslands, wetlands and riparian habitat. Working together volunteers, staff, school children and others have planted thousands of young valley oaks, cottonwoods and willows. Cattle feed on weeds and non-native grasses as part of a grazing program to bring back native vegetation and create short grass habitat that is, once again, attracting sandhill cranes, geese and shorebirds.

American white pelicans



Red-winged blackbird



Legend

 Refuge Project Boundary

 Limited Public Use
(Call office for details)

 Closed to Public Use

 Headquarters

 Visitor Information

 Road

 Railroad

0 1 2 Miles
0 1.6 3.2 Kilometers



Sacramento

Morrison Creek

99

Elk Grove Blvd

Elk Grove

n Road



mbert Road

Lambert Road

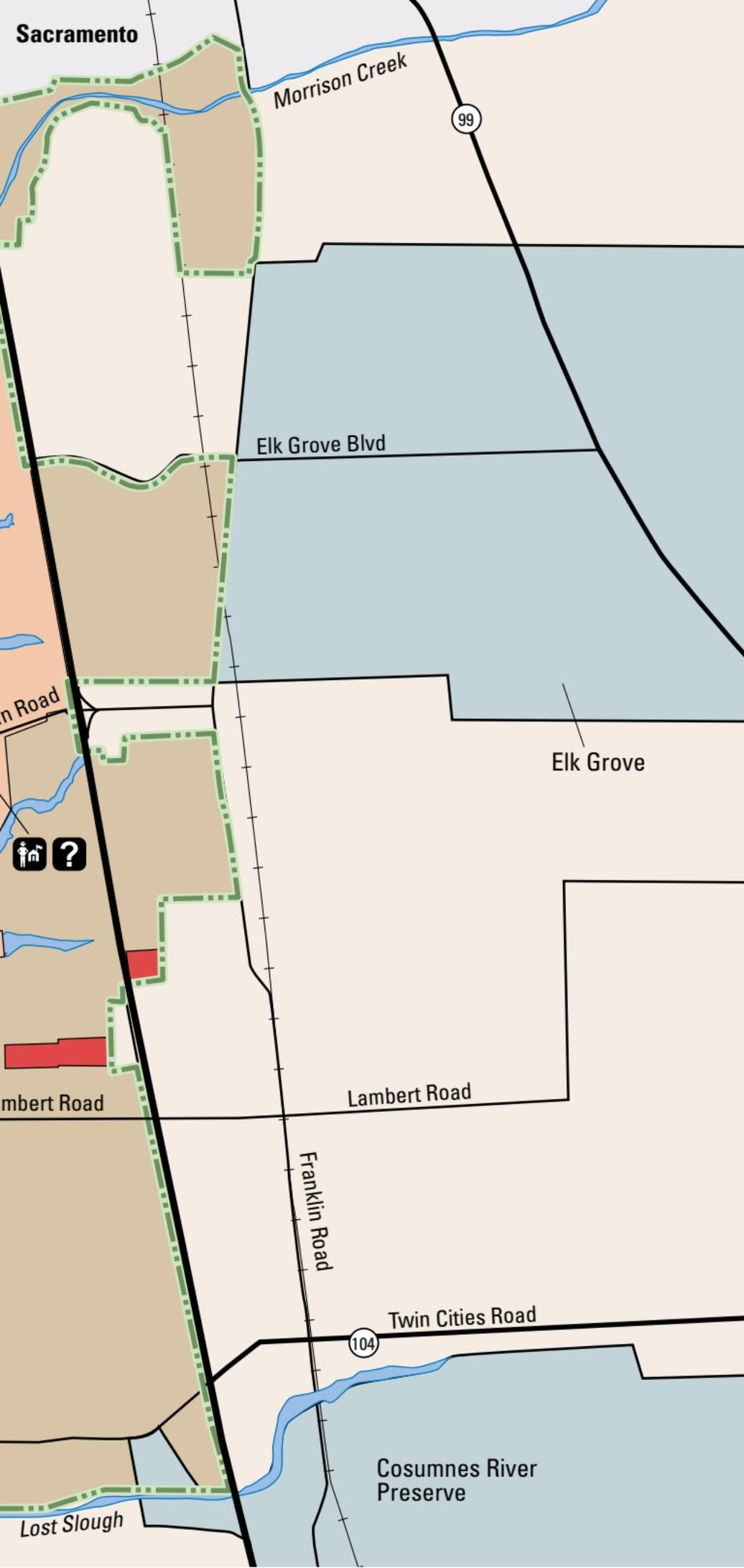
Franklin Road

Twin Cities Road

104

Cosumnes River Preserve

Lost Slough



Since wildlife conservation is the primary mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the refuge strives to balance conservation needs with educational and recreational programs.

Recreational Opportunities

Visitors can enjoy opportunities for wildlife viewing, photography, and interpretation on the refuge. Other recreational opportunities are being developed, with special emphasis on youth and barrier-free access.

In August 2000, the refuge dedicated its first wildlife viewing facility, a 100-foot wooden boardwalk culminating at a 12-foot high wildlife viewing platform. The new facility is fully accessible to those with mobility impairments.

Wildlife viewing platform



On the second and fourth Saturdays of the month, the trail to the viewing platform is open and docents are present to offer viewing tips. Special guided tours are frequently offered. To find out more about visiting hours, tours and special events, call the refuge's recorded information line at 916/775-4420.

Educational Programs

Stone Lakes offers environmental education programs and school tours, by reservation. More than 2,000 scouts and school children annually. Throughout the year, the refuge and its partners also host a variety of special events, from tree planting, weeding, and refuge cleanup to *Walk on the Wildside*, a full day on the refuge with exhibits, tours and children's activities.

Care For It

Visitor Guidelines

Respect “Closed Area” signs that restrict access to sensitive areas.

Stay on established roads and trails.



Wildlife watchers

Watch for poison oak and ticks (May through July).

Avoid approaching wildlife or moving too close to nests or dens.

Keep dogs and other pets at home; pets are not permitted on the refuge.

Take only memories (no collecting) and please remove all litter.

Partners Make It Work



Belted kingfisher

The refuge’s goals could not be accomplished alone. More than any other force, Stone Lakes was established and is being restored through partnerships. The staff has slowly built ties with other landowning agencies, conservation groups and many of its farming neighbors.

It has also worked with partners on many special projects, such as becoming one of the National Audubon Society’s Important Bird Areas, controlling upland weeds and water hyacinth — a non-native plant that chokes waterways, and developing other recreational programs.

See It

Come Prepared

The refuge is undeveloped. There is a portable restroom, but no drinking water.

Weather and other conditions can become extreme. Wear good walking shoes (waterproof during the rainy season), a hat and proper clothing for the weather.



Bring personal comfort items, such as sunscreen, insect repellent, water and allergy medicine.

Don't forget binoculars, field guides and other aids to help you see wildlife.

Raccoons



Viewing Tips

Be patient. Move quietly and slowly. Remember, wild animals startle easily.



California rose

Remain on marked trails. Stay in a group. Allow for periods of silence to let wildlife adjust to your presence.

Use binoculars, spotting scopes and your ears to help locate wildlife or get close-up views.

Use field guides to identify wildlife, their habits and habitats.

Watch for wildlife where two habitat types meet, such as a pond and grassland. These edges provide cover and forage and are frequently used by wildlife.

Look for tracks and scat along trails to identify species living in a habitat.

Respect the rights of other visitors.

Stone Lakes NWR's location and biodiversity make it unique – and so do its supporters!

Dunlins and least sandpipers



Support It

Make the Refuge Yours

For those who live in cities, the need to “reconnect” to nature is becoming stronger than ever. Reconnecting is not only the desire to smell the breeze, watch a bird fly or sit tranquilly by the water. For many, reconnecting means getting actively involved in preserving the natural world and making it better.

You can support Stone Lakes NWR through scouting and school projects or during family restoration days. You can become a volunteer and help with special events, guided tours, bird surveys, restoration, refuge cleanup, office duties and more.

You can also become involved in the Stone Lakes NWR Association, a non-profit organization that supports refuge activities.

School project



For information, contact the refuge Monday through Friday, between 7:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Nearby Attractions



Burrowing owl

The Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area is just to the north, Cosumnes River Preserve and the Isenberg Crane Reserve are to the south, and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta is part of our western border.

“Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the programs and activities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is available to all individuals regardless of age, race, religion, color, sex, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, status as a parent, protected genetic information. Please direct any questions to the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.”

Red-tailed hawk



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