



CELEBRATING A  
**CENTURY**  
of CONSERVATION

# Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

*Planning Update #1/Summer 2002*

## Comprehensive Conservation Planning Begins in Fall



*Measuring a scrub jay*



*California rose*

### Greetings from the Refuge Manager

Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) is about to embark on an important multi-year process to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the refuge. This plan will help guide overall refuge management for the next 15 years. Your ideas and comments will be an important part of the process, so I'd like to invite you to participate.

Before we begin the process, I'd like to provide background about the refuge's history, operation, and goals. You'll also find some information about the National Wildlife Refuge System and how comprehensive conservation planning fits into the overall picture of refuge management.

Planning will officially begin during the fall of 2002. You should receive our first "Planning Update" at that time, describing

the beginning of the planning process and information about attending our public scoping meetings.

We will frequently refer to aspects of the background materials provided in this planning update throughout the CCP process. Please try to read it before our first meeting; this will help all of us start on the same page, so to speak, when we begin our public scoping meetings.

I hope you'll feel free to contact me or Miki Fujitsubo if you have any questions. See page 9 to learn about the CCP and page 10 for our phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

*Tom Harvey*

Tom Harvey  
Refuge Manager

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### What is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The FWS manages the 94-million acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses more than 540 refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas.

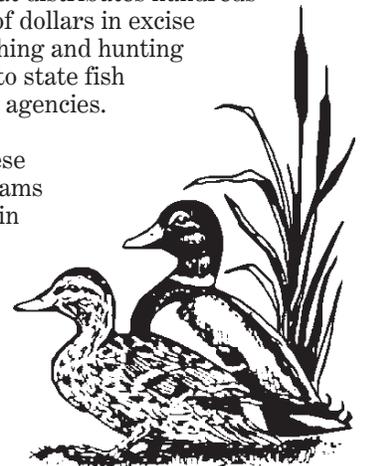
It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices, and 78 ecological services field stations.

The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat

such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their wildlife and habitat conservation efforts.

The FWS also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

Some of these FWS programs are housed in the Federal Building at Cottage Way in Sacramento.



## What is the National Wildlife Refuge System?

In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt protected an island with nesting pelicans, herons, ibis, and roseate spoonbills in Florida's Indian River from feather collectors decimating their colonies. He established Pelican Island as the nation's first bird sanctuary and went on to establish many other sanctuaries for wildlife during his tenure. This small network of sanctuaries continued to expand, later becoming the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Today, nearly 100 years later, Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 540 National Wildlife Refuges encompassing nearly 94 million acres nationwide. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the largest system of lands in the world dedicated primarily for the conservation of wildlife. It is spread across 50 states, American Samoa, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Johnston Atoll, Midway Atoll, and several other Pacific Islands. About 20.6 million acres in the Refuge System are managed as wilderness under the Wilderness Act of 1964.



In 1997 Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, legislation which provides clear guidance for the management of the Refuge System. The act included a new statutory mission statement and directed the Service to manage the Refuge System as a national system of lands and waters devoted to conserving wildlife and maintaining biological integrity of ecosystems.

This law requires the FWS to develop a comprehensive conservation plan for each refuge. It also stated that certain wildlife-dependent recreational uses are priority public uses on refuges and strengthened the compatibility determination process for assuring that these and other activities do not conflict with refuge management purposes and goals.

## What's in a name?

Many people confuse state and federal fish and wildlife agencies because their names are similar. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is a federal agency within the U.S. Department of Interior. The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is a department within the California Resources Agency.

Our names are similar and so are our missions: Both agencies are dedicated to wildlife conservation for the benefit of present and future generations. Our jurisdictions are different. The FWS is the lead agency responsible for federally-listed species and migratory birds, whether they are located on federal, state, or private lands. The DFG has primary responsibility for resident fish and wildlife on state and private lands, and oversees state-listed species and stream alteration issues throughout California.

Stone Lakes NWR is managed by the FWS, which coordinates with DFG on a variety of management issues.

*“Wild beasts and birds are by right not the property merely of people who are alive today, but the property of unknown generations whose belongings we have no right to squander.”*

*President Theodore Roosevelt*

## What is the mission of the Refuge System?



*Tundra swans*

Refuges are places where wildlife comes first.

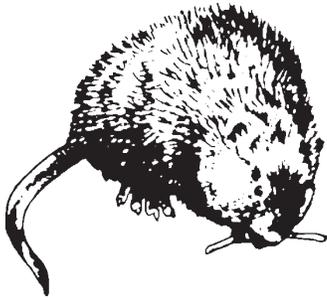
“The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

The FWS is a “primary use agency.” This means that units of the Refuge System are managed first and foremost for the benefit of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. Our mission differs from other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, which focuses on forest stewardship and sustainable forest uses; the Bureau of Land Management, which deals with the productivity and multiple use of the land; and the National Park Service, which conserves scenery, wildlife, and historic objects for people's enjoyment.

## Project Location and Watershed

Stone Lakes NWR is located in southern Sacramento County, in the outskirts of the community of Elk Grove. It is within the Morrison Creek, Cosumnes and Mokelumne river watersheds, and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta (Delta), as conveyed on page 6.

The approved refuge boundary is roughly defined by Morrison Creek to the north, Franklin Boulevard to the east, the old Southern Pacific Railroad to the west, and Twin Cities Road (Lost Slough) to the south.



## Refuge History

Before European settlement, the Beach-Stone Lakes Basin was a magnet for wildlife. Elk, pronghorn, and even grizzly bear inhabited the grasslands. During winter storms, the flooded basin could stretch from lower Morrison Creek, 10 miles south to the Mokelumne River, expanding lakes and seasonal wetlands that supported tens of thousands of migratory birds. The land destined to become a National Wildlife Refuge literally teemed with wildlife!

The Plains Miwok relied on the land and its abundant wildlife for survival. These American Indians often camped, hunted, and fished along the area's lake shores.

Historic Beach Lake once covered nearly 1,000 acres. North and South Stone Lakes were also extensive. Located in the heart of the refuge, they likely received their names in the mid 1800s from the former landowner, a Sacramento merchant named Rockwell Stone. The Stone family held about 1,000 acres until 1891.

### BASIN BEGINS TO CHANGE

Many changes occurred beginning in the mid 1800s. Levees were constructed along the Sacramento River and around Delta

## Refuge Project Size and Lands

The approved refuge boundary for Stone Lakes NWR — the area within which the FWS is authorized (depending on willing landowners) to acquire, protect, and manage land — is 18,000 acres (See map on page 5).

Within the approved boundary, the FWS owns or manages 4,065 acres. Another 5,000 acres are already owned by Sacramento County and several state agencies.

According to its FEIS, the refuge works only with willing landowners and is required by federal law to pay fair market value when acquiring an interest in the property. Thanks to these willing landowners and a number of cooperating agencies, the 4,065 acres under FWS management at Stone Lakes NWR include:

- 2,791 acres under cooperative agreements;
- 1,136 acres in fee title ownership; and
- 138 acres under easement.

islands so the land could be farmed. A railroad was built, bisecting the basin and allowing near complete drainage of its lakes. Finally, Interstate 5 was constructed, ushering in tremendous pressure for urban development.

As Sacramento grew in the mid 1960s, the Army Corps of Engineers suggested building channels in the area to hold floodwaters. Conservation organizations also became interested in the basin in the late 1960s, hoping to avoid a major flood control project and keep the area natural. During the same period, a local developer proposed building a new town of 50,000 people around North Stone Lake.

### LAND PROTECTION BEGINS

In response to these pressures and in recognition of the importance of the Stone Lakes Basin floodplain, the State of California and County of Sacramento purchased about 2,600 acres in the early 1970s, turning the land over to their respective park departments to manage.

By the late 1980s the idea of further protecting the Stone Lakes Basin by

*continued on page 4*

*The land  
destined  
to become  
a National  
Wildlife Refuge  
literally teemed  
with wildlife!*



*Examining goldfields, a vernal pool plant*



*Winter flooding in Stone Lakes Basin*

*There was  
strong support  
for the  
refuge...*

## History...

*continued from page 3*

establishing a National Wildlife Refuge took hold. There was strong support for the refuge because the unique lakes and waterways of the basin are entirely within the 100-year floodplain. The basin also occupies a strategic location for buffering urban encroachment into the Delta. Additionally, a National Wildlife Refuge could potentially provide a habitat link with neighboring Cosumnes River Preserve. Several local legislators supported protecting the land from development and were in a position to help move the process forward.

In July 1992, the FWS completed an involved two-year public planning process resulting in preparation of a Land Protection Plan and a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The FEIS defined the present 18,000-acre approved refuge boundary.

During this period, the FWS received many comments about the potential effects a refuge could have on its neighbors and the FEIS' adequacy in addressing these issues. After responding to these comments and concerns, with a broad base of local support the refuge was established in 1992.

With acquisition of its first land in 1994 Stone Lakes NWR was officially designated the 505<sup>th</sup> unit in the National Wildlife Refuge System. It joined the ranks of other local land management projects, including the Cosumnes River Preserve to the south and the Vic Fazio Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area to the west, which have similar goals of protecting and enhancing imperilled Central Valley fish and wildlife habitats.

## Refuge Goals

Interim refuge goals were defined in the FEIS and Land Protection Plan and are the foundation of our Comprehensive Conservation Plan. We will refine and refer to these goals during our planning:

- Preserve, enhance, and restore a diverse assemblage of native Central Valley plant communities and their associated fish, wildlife, and plants;
- Preserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of rare, threatened, and endangered plants and animals;
- Preserve, enhance, and restore wetlands and adjacent agricultural lands to provide foraging and sanctuary habitat needed to achieve the distribution and population levels of migratory waterfowl and other water birds consistent with the goals and objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture;
- Create linkages between refuge habitats and habitats on adjacent lands to reverse past impacts of habitat fragmentation on wildlife and plants;
- Coordinate refuge land acquisition and management activities with other agencies and organizations and to maximize the effectiveness of refuge contributions to regional habitat needs;
- Provide for environmental education, interpretation, and fish and wildlife-oriented recreation in an urban setting accessible to large populations; and
- Manage riverine wetlands and adjacent floodplain lands in a manner consistent with local, State, and Federal flood management; sediment and erosion control, and water quality objectives.

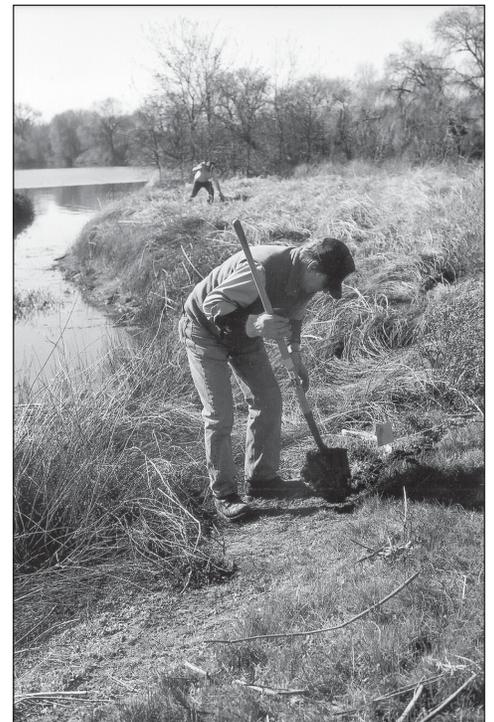


*Mallards*

## Refuge Purposes

The purposes of Stone Lakes NWR are defined by language within a number of acts of Congress which grant the FWS general authority to acquire land for National Wildlife Refuges:

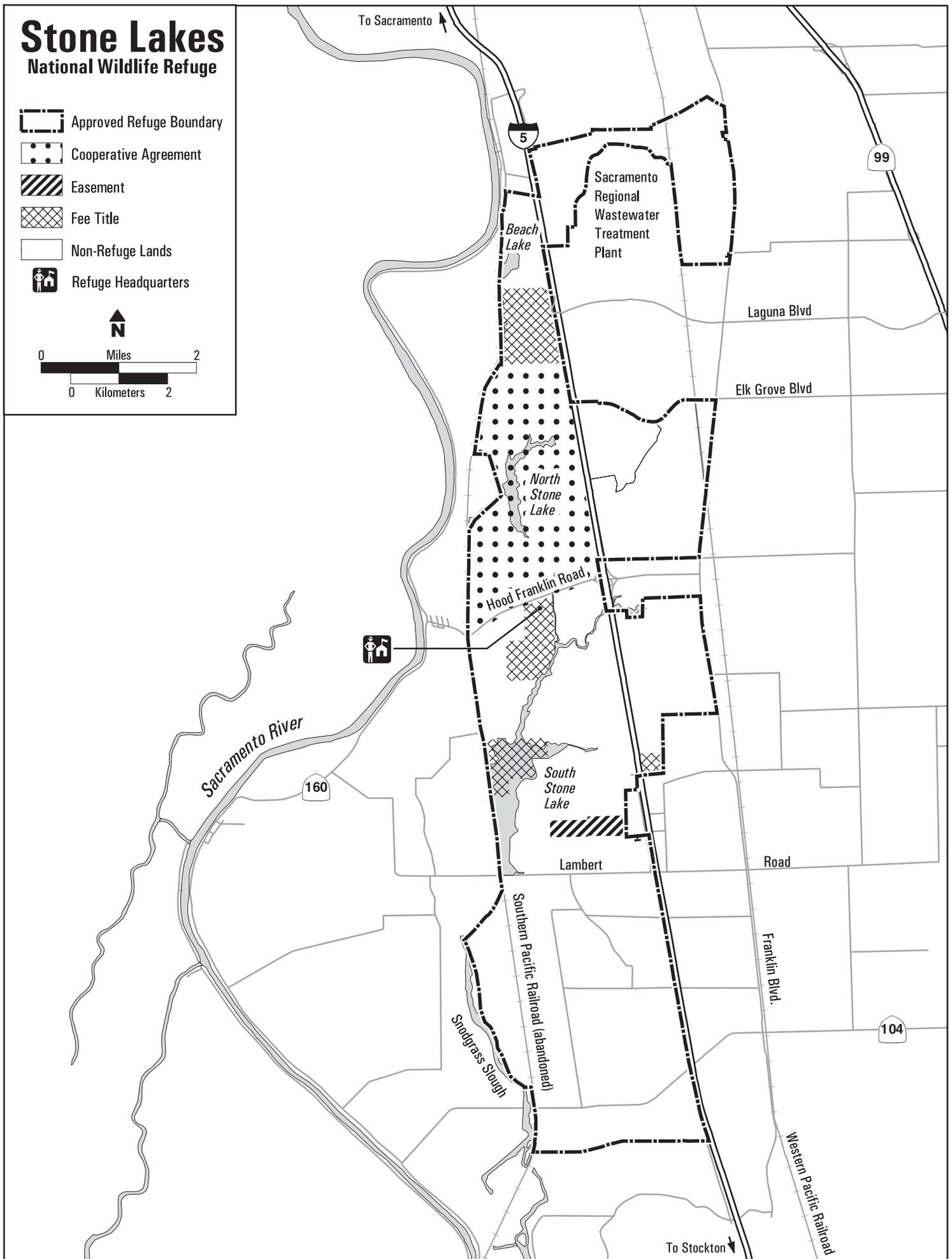
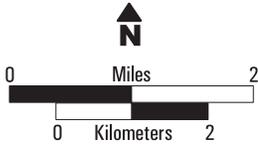
- ...for the conservation of the wetlands of the Nation in order to maintain the public benefits they provide and to help fulfill international obligations contained in various migratory bird treaties and conventions ... 16 U.S.C. §3901(b) (Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986)
- ...for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ... 16 U.S.C. §742f(a)(4)
- ...for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services ... 16 U.S.C. §742f(b)(1) (*Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956*)
- ...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds. 16 U.S.C. §715d (*Migratory Bird Conservation Act*)
- ...to conserve (A) fish or wildlife which are listed as endangered species or threatened species .... or (B) plants ... 16 U.S.C. §1534 (*Endangered Species Act of 1973*) and other purposes.

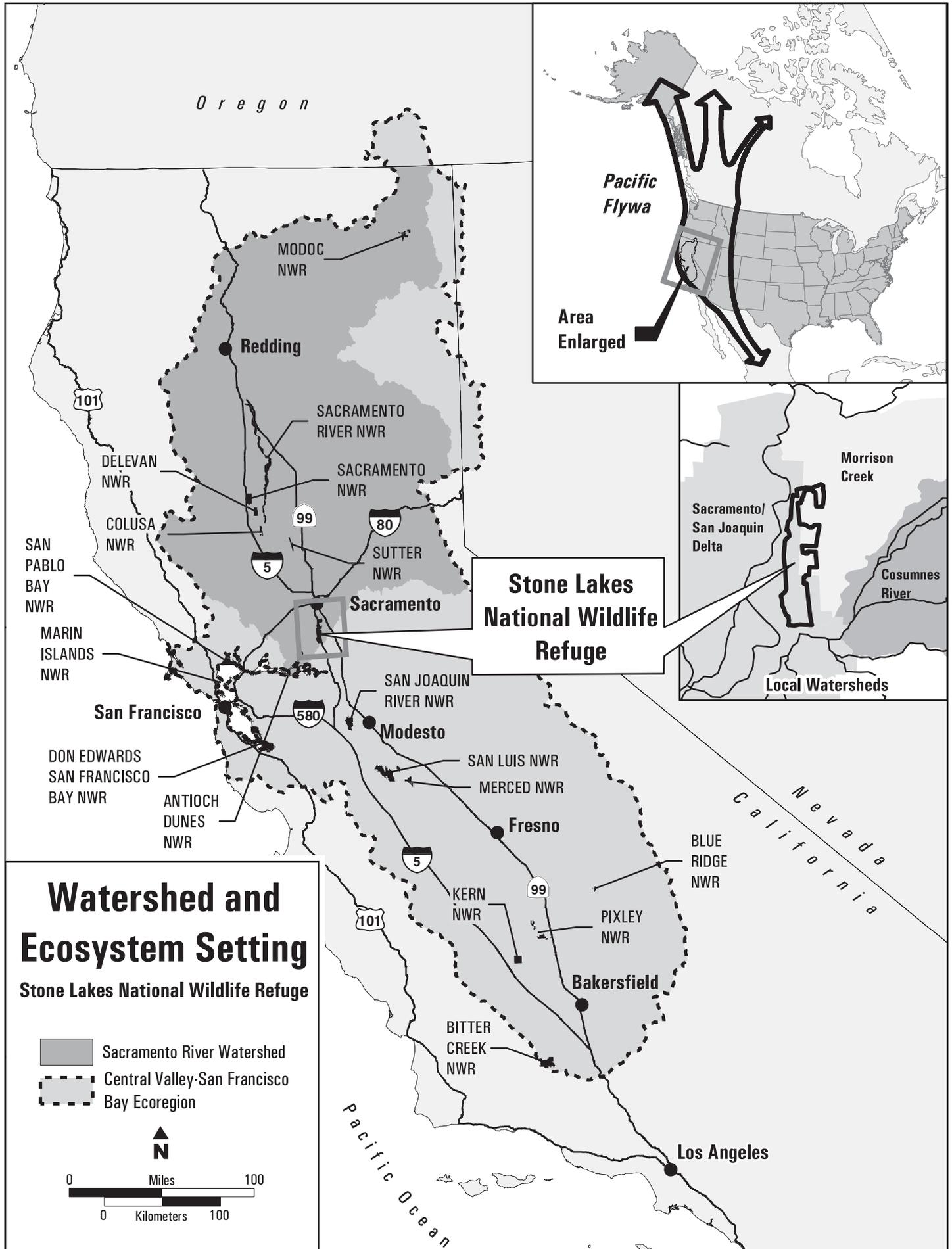


*Volunteers help with tree planting.*

# Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

-  Approved Refuge Boundary
-  Cooperative Agreement
-  Easement
-  Fee Title
-  Non-Refuge Lands
-  Refuge Headquarters





## How Land May Be Protected

Depending on the preference of each landowners and according to FWS policy, we protect lands by acquiring the least amount of "interest" in property necessary to accomplish refuge goals. Land protection methods may include technical assistance, cooperative agreements, easements, fee title acquisition, and donations.

If funds are available the FWS can pursue fee or easement acquisitions from local landowners whose properties lie within the approved refuge boundary. If an owner wishes to sell an interest in his or her property (i.e. easement or fee title), the FWS is required under the U.S. Constitution to pay fair market value for the property as determined by an appraisal.

In other words, we may protect an important foraging area for sandhill cranes that is owned by an interested landowner by pursuing a grant or program that provides an economic incentive to maintain or improve his land for cranes. It may not be necessary, or even desirable, for the FWS to directly own an interest in land in order to create or maintain wildlife-friendly conditions on it.

The 1,274 acres of land within Stone Lakes NWR that the FWS currently owns in fee or easement were acquired at a cost of about \$6.6 million. These funds came from a variety of private, state, and federal funding sources, in cooperation with an array of public agencies and private organizations and individuals.

In 1999 the FWS entered into an eight-year cooperative agreement to implement a grassland management program on the county and state-owned North Stone Lake property and to manage the 2,791-acre property as part of the refuge.

In addition, the FWS is discussing with the California Department of Transportation and AKT Development Corporation the transfer of their 150 and 1,400-acre properties, respectively, within the approved refuge boundary.

Finally, the FWS is cooperating with three private groups — Wildlands Inc., the American Land Conservancy, and Lewis Investment Company — regarding the restoration and transfer of 608 acres to the refuge.

## New Refuge Headquarters Site

During the summer of 2001, after six years of managing the refuge from an office on Watt Avenue in Sacramento, we were very pleased to acquire property on the refuge with a building suitable for our headquarters.

It took some remodeling to convert the former residence into an office and we are still trying to improve our phone and internet connections, but it is wonderful being in the heart of the land we are managing.

We were not only fortunate to acquire property with a structure suitable for a refuge headquarters, we also acquired nearly 100 acres of vineyards. When combining this acreage with a previous land purchase we made in 1997, we now have 330 acres that will eventually be restored and managed into native grasslands, seasonal wetlands, riparian woodlands, and more wildlife-friendly farming.

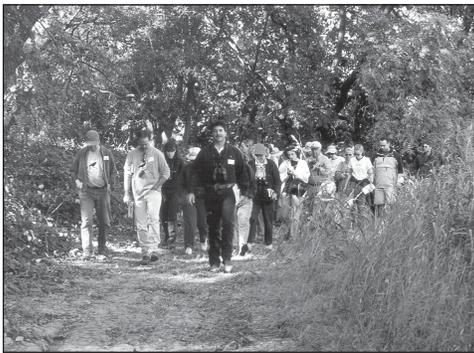
In addition to these habitat improvements we also plan to develop trails and other on-site viewing opportunities for the public. In November 2001, the last of the grapevines were removed from the headquarters site, the first step toward making these improvements. We invite all of you to stop by for a visit and see the transformation. We are just a mile west of Interstate 5, on Hood-Franklin Road.

*Right: New refuge headquarters.  
Inset: Grape vines removed to prepare for restoration.*



*Riparian habitat and permanent wetlands*

*Habitat enhancement efforts have yielded over 1,400 acres of improved wetlands within the refuge boundary.*



*Visitors on guided refuge tour*



*Boy scouts enjoying wildlife viewing*



*Grading a new wetland*

## Stone Lakes NWR Programs Today

The comprehensive conservation planning process upon which we are about to embark allows the public an opportunity to share ideas and make comments about how the refuge will be managed over the next 15 years. To assist you, we'd like to describe our current programs.

### HABITAT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Partnerships with agencies that have lands or interests within the refuge boundary form the foundation of our habitat management programs. Some of our closest partners are Sacramento County Regional Parks, Recreation, and Open Space; Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District; Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District; California Department of Transportation (Caltrans); California Department of Water Resources; California Department of Parks and Recreation; California Department of Boating and Waterways; and the California Department of Fish and Game.

Since 1996 the FWS has been participating in the five-year partnership known as the Stone Lakes Water Hyacinth Control Group. This public/private cooperative effort includes many of the previously-mentioned agencies plus seven private landowners who have been working together to combat water hyacinth, which is now nearly under control. This invasive non-native plant clogs waterways, or prevents them from carrying water for wetlands, irrigation, or drainage. We are also working with our partners to control other invasive species, such as pepperweed and star thistle.

Additionally, we have initiated a grazing program to reduce fire danger, benefit native grasses, and improve foraging conditions for migratory birds, such as sandhill cranes, geese, and ducks on the North Stone Lake property.

Our habitat enhancement efforts, in cooperation with private, state, and other federal partners, have yielded more than 1,400 acres of improved wetlands on four properties within the refuge boundary. Our wildlife monitoring shows a strong, positive response by wildlife, with increases in both the varieties and numbers of birds, other wildlife, and native plants.

### TRIBAL CONSULTATIONS

The Plains Miwok have a long history in the Stone Lakes Basin. We routinely collaborate with the local tribal group —

the Ione Band of Miwok Indians — regarding how best to protect cultural sites. They also cooperate with the refuge on special events and plan to help develop interpretive materials and traditional Miwok structures.

### VISITOR SERVICES

The amount of land under refuge management has slowly increased. This must occur before we are capable of expanding visitor services. Our first priority has been to ensure that the needs of our growing wildlife populations are balanced with accommodating the strong public interest in visiting the refuge.

In recent legislation, Congress recognized six wildlife-dependent activities that are considered priority public uses of refuges: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

Our visitor services program is still in its infancy because our land base has been so limited. Right now, the refuge has fledgling programs that accommodate the first four uses, but not fishing and hunting.

Thanks to the fundraising efforts of our refuge support group, the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge Association, we have the first visitor use facility on the refuge — a wildlife viewing platform that overlooks a lake and a managed wetland. We now open a trail to the viewing platform twice a month and hope to continue to expand access opportunities with the help of our refuge volunteers.

Throughout the year we hold special events, such as volunteer habitat restoration days, rookery tours, or Walk on the Wildside — a day-long event we host with our partners in May of each year.

Our environmental education program has a solid foundation, reaching several thousand school groups and scout troops each year. And through an ongoing cooperative venture in the South Stone Lake area between the refuge, CALFED Bay-Delta Program, California Department of Fish and Game, and a number of private organizations, we may soon be able to offer fishing and hunting programs, with special opportunities that focus on youth and persons with disabilities.

The CCP process will provide all of you with an opportunity to share your ideas regarding refuge uses, wildlife and habitat management, and more.

## What is a CCP?

When Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, it incorporated an underlying philosophy that “wildlife comes first” on refuges.

The act provides the FWS with guidance for managing refuges to ensure the long-term conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. Three important principles of the act are to maintain biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuge and facilitate compatible wildlife-dependent recreation.

Every refuge is to have a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) completed by 2012. The CCP will outline refuge goals, objectives, and management strategies. It is a flexible, “living” document that will be updated every 15 years.

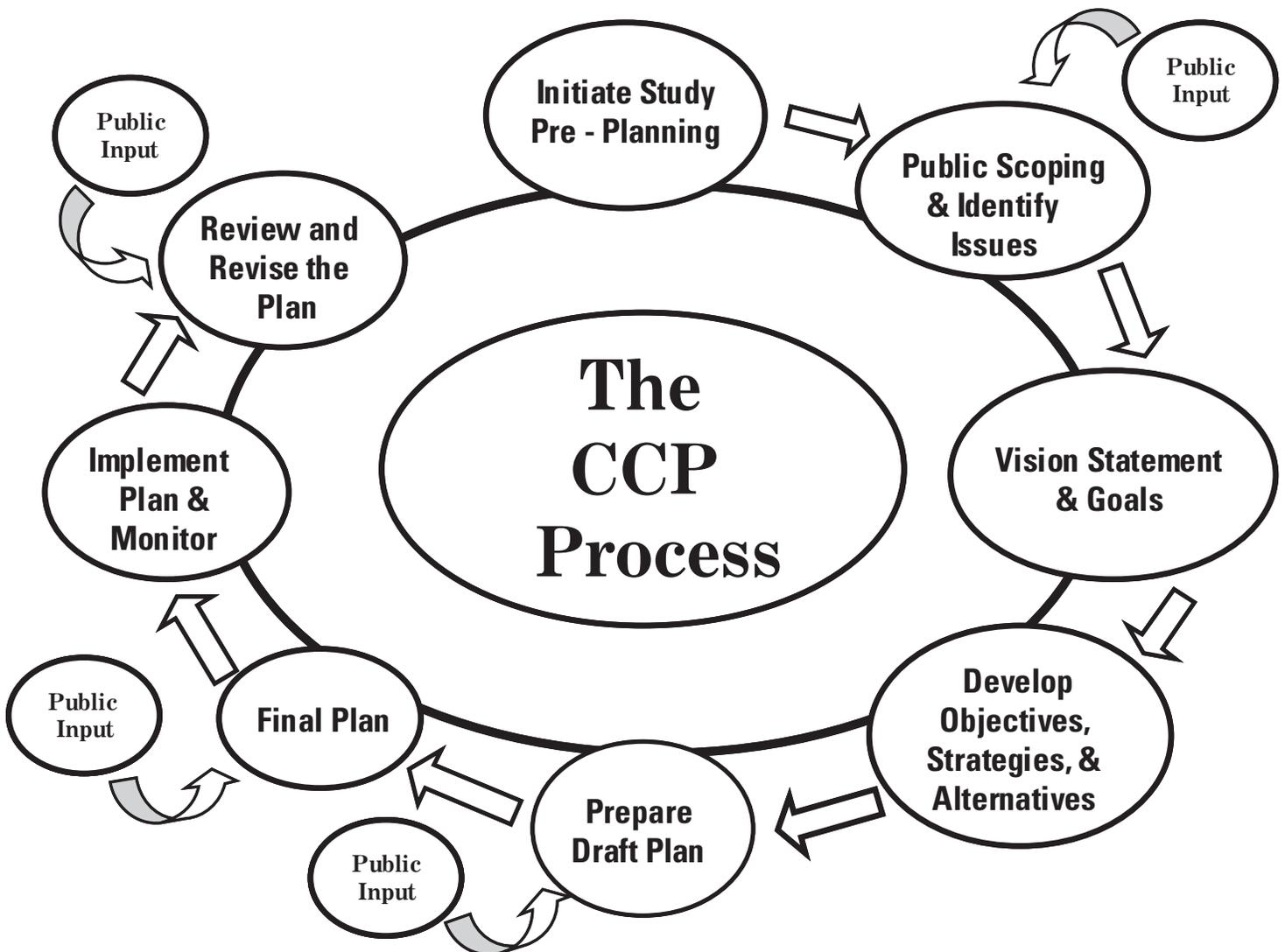
The CCP:

- Ensures that management of the refuge reflects the purposes of the refuge and the mission, policies, and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System;
- Provides the public with an understanding of the reasons for management actions on the refuge;
- Provides a vision statement for the refuge;
- Ensures the compatibility of current and future uses of the refuge with its purposes;
- Provides long-term continuity in refuge management; and

- Provides budget justification for operation and maintenance and facility development requests.

The CCP will provide broad management direction and guidance for the refuge, contingent upon future funding and resources. The accompanying environmental document, required by the National Environmental Policy Act, will describe the alternatives considered and their environmental effects. You will have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft CCP and environmental document.

During fall 2002 we will hold our first public scoping meetings to help identify issues and gather information. The key planning steps are listed below and will be listed in future updates so you can track our progress through the planning process.



*“Stone Lakes  
serves as a  
vital link in  
the Pacific Flyway  
for migrating birds.”*

*Congressman Robert Matsui  
Laguna Times, September 15, 1993*

## Compatibility of refuge uses

Prior to allowing various public uses on the refuge, federal law requires that the FWS first determine that these specific uses are compatible.

A compatible use is a proposed or existing use of a national wildlife refuge that, based on sound professional judgement of the refuge manager, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purposes of the refuge.

Compatibility determinations are used to help evaluate such uses and will be integrated as part of the CCP planning process.

## Help us plan the future

During fall 2002 interested individuals, agencies, tribes, organizations, and other stakeholders will be invited to express their concerns and share their visions for the refuge. This will be your opportunity to help us identify issues and concerns, and for us to answer any questions you may have. Your comments and/or participation will be critical to the success of this planning effort.

We will send you our first planning update in the fall of 2002, announcing the beginning of the CCP effort and the dates, times, and locations of public scoping meetings.

## Please feel free to contact us!

We are available to provide additional information about the refuge history, goals, and accomplishments to date, and to answer any questions about the planning process. Feel free to call, write, e-mail, or come to see us.

If you did not receive this newsletter through the mail and would like to be on our mailing list, please contact us. You can also get information at our website <http://pacific.fws.gov/planning/>

If you would like to be removed from the list or are receiving multiple copies of these notices, please let us know.

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*Placing banded owl back in nest box*



*Great egret*

### CCP Schedule

Fall 2001	Begin preplanning
Summer 2002	Mail out background information
Early Fall 2002	Hold public scoping meetings, and begin the CCP process

### Meeting Dates/Locations

**Monday, September 16, 2002**  
Elk Grove Community Services District  
Board Room  
8820 Elk Grove Blvd.  
Elk Grove, CA 95624

**Thursday, September 26, 2002**  
Clunie Community Center (Auditorium) -  
McKinley Park  
601 Alhambra Blvd.  
Sacramento, CA 95816

**Wednesday, October 2, 2002**  
Jean Harvie Community Center  
14273 River Road  
Walnut Grove, CA 95690

**Thursday, October 10, 2002**  
Veterans' Memorial Center at (Club  
Room)  
203 East 14th Street - (at 14th & B Street)  
Davis, CA 95616