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COOPERATIVE PROGRAM WORKED OUT TO MAINTAIN WATERFOWL HABITAT IN CALIFORNIA

A cooperative program between two Department of the Interior agencies and the State of California to protect and improve the waterfowl habitat on the Pacific flyway was announced today by Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman.

The proposal, if ratified by necessary executive and legislative action, would insure a water supply to flood grasslands in central California which are of major importance to migratory birds during the fall, winter, and early spring. It involves the development of water as a part of the Central Valley Project to replace water rights for which were purchased for irrigation purposes in 1939.

The agencies are the Bureau of Reclamation, which is in charge of construction and operation of the Central Valley Project, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Collaborating is the California Fish and Game Commission. Essential to the fulfillment of the program is financing and development of additional water which is the key to most California resource protection and development.

The Grasslands area of the San Joaquin Valley is important as a wintering ground and as a link in the Pacific flyway, used by ducks and other migratory birds in their seasonal flights north and south. The expanding agricultural development in the valley and particularly the purchase of the so-called "Grasslands water rights" so that the water could be put to beneficial use in the southern San Joaquin Valley, has made necessary some protective measures for the migratory waterfowl.

Secretary Chapman stated that the program is an example of how fish and wildlife resources can be protected and improved in the course of the development of the water resources of the Nation, by cooperative action of the agencies involved.

Although the Grasslands water rights were purchased in 1939, by the Bureau of Reclamation, the Grasslands waterfowl area has been receiving water on an interim basis from Millerton Lake pending completion of the Friant-Kern canal. Millerton Lake was created by the construction of Friant Dam, as a part of the Central Valley Project.

Now the Friant-Kern canal, which carries water from Millerton Lake to agricultural lands in the southern San Joaquin Valley, is in operation and water for the Grasslands area is no longer available from that source.

The proposed program involves the development from indigenous sources or to make available from existing Central Valley Project sources other than Millerton Lake, of approximately 13.2 second-feet of water for the Los Banos State waterfowl refuge. And additional supply would be developed for an enlargement by the State of

approximately 6,700 acres to the existing refuge. It is proposed that there shall also be developed as a part of the Central Valley Project, a water supply to supplement the existing water rights on a proposed 12,000-acre Federal waterfowl management area in Merced County east of the San Joaquin River to be created from land authorized for purchase by the Congress.

The program also suggests the organization of the landowners in the Grasslands area into a district for the purpose of conserving and developing drainage and underground water for all useful purposes, including the conservation of waterfowl, and to contract for such assistance as may be necessary. Should such action not be taken by July 1, 1953, it is proposed that additional waterfowl areas be acquired, developed, and operated by the State and Federal Governments to provide suitable waterfowl habitat. In such event, the water supply for such areas would be developed by the Bureau of Reclamation.

The program proposes that cost of Federal participation in the program be included in a nonreimbursable allocation for fish and wildlife conservation as a part of the Central Valley Project. This would require legislation.

The program involves not to exceed 7,000 acre-feet of water from existing Central Valley Project sources annually. Such additional water as may be necessary, including an estimated 40,000 acre-feet annually for the proposed Federal waterfowl management area, would be developed from other than existing project sources such as the return flow from present and new irrigation developments and a tapping of the underground water supply.

"We believe," the Bureau heads stated in their recommendation to Secretary Chapman, "that the State and Federal management area programed for acquisition, and the water supply program outlined for the public area will be, upon completion, a significant contribution toward maintenance of the lower San Joaquin Valley as an important link in the Pacific flyway and that it is in accordance with the objective of multiple-purpose development of water control projects."

The program submittal was signed by Michael W. Straus, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, and Albert M. Day, Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, and was endorsed by William E. Warne, Assistant Secretary of the Interior in charge of water and power resources.

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