

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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INTERIOR, PRIVATE LANDOWNERS WORKING TO PRESERVE WATERFOWL HABITAT IN CALIFORNIA

Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel today announced that two of his Department's agencies are working with private landowners in California to preserve important waterfowl habitat at about one-tenth of what it would cost Uncle Sam to do the same job.

Involved are 46,000 acres in the Grasslands Water District of Merced County. This is all that remains of the original "Grasslands"--200,000 acres of flat grassy terrain on the floor of the San Joaquin Valley.

The District has agreed to flood the area in the spring with water supplied by the Bureau of Reclamation to assist waterfowl production and again early in the fall as an aid to early winged migrants in the Pacific Flyway. It also will release water for the nearby 5,900-acre Kesterson waterfowl management area operated by Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

Secretary Hickel said his Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife conducted studies which showed that \$575,000 per year would be required to operate a publicly-owned management area to compensate for the loss of the privately-owned habitat, if it were not available.

In a report to the Secretary, Commissioner Charles H. Meacham of the Fish and Wildlife Service said: "The steady and unrelenting reduction of marshlands in the San Joaquin Valley has resulted in the crowding of wintering waterfowl areas of limited size. Consequently, the remaining habitat base, the Grasslands, is vital to the maintenance of waterfowl resources of the Pacific Flyway."

The Federal wildlife agency believes that the spring flooding will produce about 8,000 ducks. And California's San Joaquin Valley is a favorite wintering ground for waterfowl--mallards, pintails, green-winged and cinnamon teal; widgeon and shovelers are common. Several species of geese also winter in the area.

The agreement planned assures that nearly one-half of the remaining waterfowl habitat in the Valley will be maintained and improved for these species.