



Tulare Basin Land Protection Planning Study

Planning Update # 2, October 2002



Dry seasonal wetland, USFWS



Isolated remnant Poso Creek, USFWS



Associated Uplands, USFWS

Greetings

This is the second in a series of Planning Updates from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) regarding a study of protecting and restoring important migratory bird habitat in the southern San Joaquin Valley also known as Tulare Basin.

Through these Updates, we share information with you and seek your involvement in our study. Your input is very important. It helps us gather information and identify issues affecting you, your community, and the natural resources of the Tulare Basin. If you do not wish to receive the Updates, please let us know through one of the points of contact listed on page 6.

Two Public Meetings were Successful Garnering Comments for “Scope”

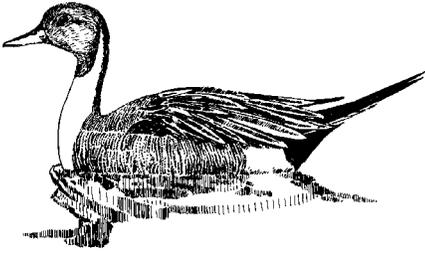
Efforts to involve public participation in a plan for conservation of wetland habitats and associated upland areas of the Tulare Basin, resulted in 61 people attending two meetings held in Visalia and Bakersfield on July 11, 2002. We had a very productive discussion of ideas, conservation opportunities and issues at both sessions. A summary of comments received is on page two. The information gathered from these public comments will guide Service staff in preparing the Land Protection Plan, Conceptual Management Plan and related Environmental Assessment for the Tulare Basin.

While covering a wide spectrum of ideas or approaches to conserving the wetland resources in the Tulare Basin, the tone of all comments received has been supportive of Service action to support the private wetland owners in securing perpetual protection for these habitats.

| In This Issue: | Page |
|----------------------------|------|
| Public Workshops Held | 1 |
| Summary of Public Comments | 2 |
| Planning Area Map | 3 |
| What Next? | 4 |
| Contact Information | 5 |

Who is participating? The private landowners within the study area and the Tulare Basin Wetlands Association. The general public and other interested groups or organizations are invited to express their

Summary of Comments:



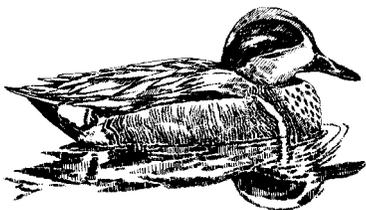
Pintail, Larry Eiffert, USFWS

The most frequent issue brought to our attention is the need for reliable, affordable water supplies for private wetlands. Requests for the Service to consider supplying or subsidizing the water supply were recorded. At this time the Service does not propose to independently resolve this important resource issue. The Service is actively engaged with numerous partners via the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture in identifying the extent of the private wetlands water supply need and evaluating potential solutions.

Many of the questions received can be considered requests for additional information about routine procedures used by the Service for conservation easements. These items include the cost, value and appraisal process that result in offers being made to individual landowners. Visit Service web sites at <http://pacific.fws.gov/planning/> and <http://realty.fws.gov/index.html> to obtain more information about realty and planning procedures and appraisal values. Inquiries as to the tax consequences of selling conservation easement interests in real property were received. The way a landowner holds title to property (individually, partnerships or incorporated) can affect the tax consequence of sales of easements. Landowners are advised to consult with a professional tax advisor to obtain specific information on their own situation.

Several inquiries were made about how mineral rights are treated, impacted or addressed. The Service proposes to purchase interests in land while leaving mineral rights in private ownership and only restrict the season of extraction or surface disturbing activities. Additional information can be obtained from FWS realty staff.

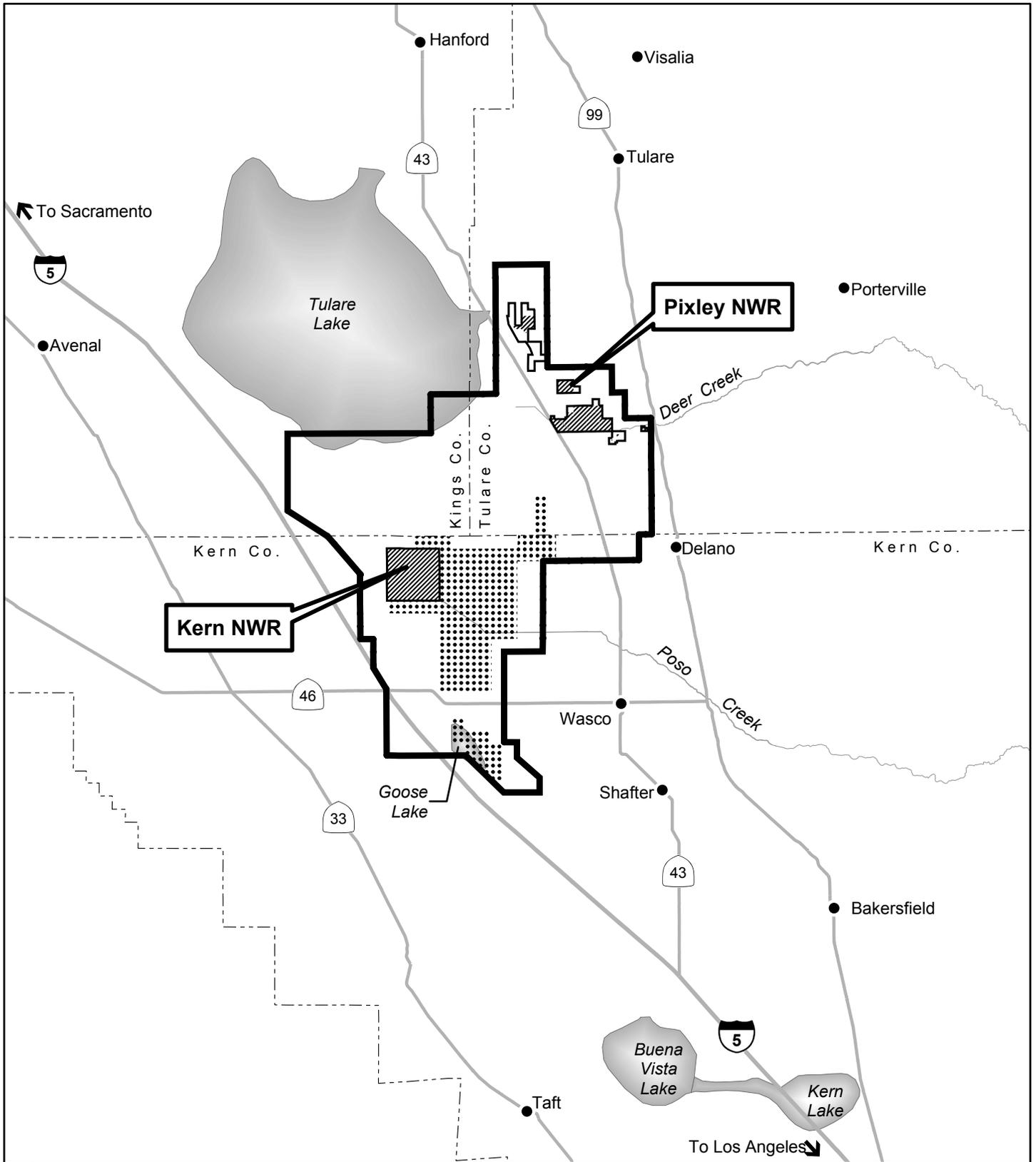
Two specific requests for expanded geographic coverage in the area of consideration for obtaining conservation easements were received. Service staff will evaluate the potential of the areas located in Kings County east of Kettleman City and south of Bakersfield in Kern County. The ability to modify uplands and opportunity to restore "idle" or currently dry wetlands was asked in numerous ways by several different persons. The existence of farming activity on uplands associated with some hunting clubs is related to the general questions about associated uplands. These issues require site specific information to address viable improvements and the potential to impact listed species that may occupy dry sites. In the present Service proposal, wetland sites in need of extensive restoration or development would not be considered a priority for conservation easements. Adding consideration of restoration potential may be a valid alternative in the environmental assessment.



Green-winged teal, Larry Eiffert, USFWS

A compilation of comments received to date can be provided upon request and will be included as an appendix to the planning documents issued for public review and comment.

Tulare Basin Study Area



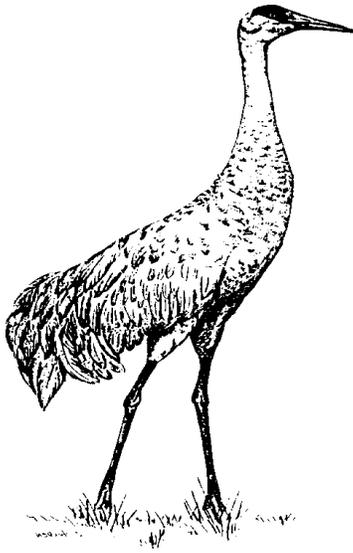
CA/NV Refuge Planning Office - June 2002



-  Approved Refuge Boundaries
-  Tulare Basin Study Area

-  FWS Lands
-  Focus Area

-  Historic Lakes



Sandhill Crane, USFWS

What Happens Next?

A schedule of key planning steps is included below. The Service will develop several planning documents including:

- A Land Protection Plan, which will describe resource protection needs, identify tracts of land on which the Service would be interested in acquiring easements from willing participants, and describe land type protection priorities.
- A Conceptual Management Plan, which will describe the habitat goals being considered for lands proposed for protection.
- An Environmental Assessment, which will evaluate the potential effects that each land protection alternative—including a proposal to acquire conservation easements as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System—would have on the physical, biological, social and economic environment.

You will have an opportunity to review and comment on these planning documents. Their availability will be announced in a future planning update. The service will review public comments on these documents and recommend a course of action. Final approval of the selected alternative will be made by the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. If the project is approved, the Service will begin implementation of the selected, alternative, based on available funding and willing participants.

Tulare Basin Land Protection Planning Study Schedule

| <u>Planning Step</u> | <u>Target Dates</u> |
|--|---------------------|
| Study Kickoff, Issue Identification, Information Gathering, Begin Scoping | July 11, 2002 |
| Reviewing Public Comments Begins, send your Issues and Comments by this date | August 30, 2002 |
| Planning Documents Available for Public Review and Comment | December 2002 |
| Public Comments on Planning Documents Due | February 2003 |
| Issue Notice of Decision | April 2003 |

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.

**For Information on the
National Wildlife
Refuge System Contact:**

Dave Hardt,
Project Leader
Kern NWR
P.O. Box 670
Delano, CA 93216
Phone: (661) 725-2767

How Do I Contact the Service or Provide Comments?

Your participation is encouraged throughout the process. Please send your written comments to Scott Frazer or Richard Smith . . .

. . . via mail: Scott Frazer, Refuge Operations Specialist
Kern National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 670
Delano, CA 93216

Richard Smith, Natural Resource Specialist
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
CA/NV Refuge Planning office
2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1916
Sacramento, CA 95825

. . . via fax: (661) 725-6041

. . . or via e-mail: FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov

(Please refer to "Tulare Lake" in the subject line.)

Richard Smith can also provide information on the planning process. Call him at (916) 414-6502, if you have any questions.



U.S. Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
Attn: NWRS/RPL
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

Address correction requested