



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Pixley National Wildlife Refuge

Cooperative Agriculture Program

Attention Farmers and Growers

Refuge Seeks Agricultural Producer for Cooperative Agriculture Program

Pixley National Wildlife Refuge is offering a Cooperative Agricultural Opportunity for grazing on the Refuge. The grazing program is intended to modify vegetation structure for the benefit of the endangered Tipton kangaroo rat, Blunt-nosed leopard lizard, San Joaquin kit fox, and Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp. Grazing will also be used to reduce the prevalence of non-native plant species.

If selected, the successful applicant will be issued a Special Use Permit (SUP) for the 2026 grazing season, with the option of extending for an additional four years.

Instructions for applying:

- Review this document in its entirety.
- Complete and sign the Application for Cooperative Agriculture Opportunity
 - Guidance for Completing the “Bid Information” Section of the Application:
 - The initial grazing rate is established at \$10.50 per AUM. There is no bidding process currently.
 - Therefore, when completing the “Bid Information” section of the application, only the “Grazing Unit Name” column should be filled out.
 - In the “Grazing Unit Name” column, please specify the units at Pixley National Wildlife Refuge where you wish to graze.
 - All other columns in the “Bid Information” section can be left blank, as they are not relevant at this time.

Applicants may schedule a tour of the Refuge by contacting management at the number below. In order to be considered, all materials must be completed and signed **by October 7, 2026** and submitted via email or mail to:

Pixley NWR Attn: Grazing Program
P.O. Box 670 Delano, CA 93216
Office: (661) 725-2767
Miguel_jimenez@fws.gov

Cooperative Agricultural Opportunity

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is soliciting proposals from qualified individuals to enter into a Cooperative Agricultural Agreement (CAA) with Pixley National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in Tulare County, California. The purpose of the CAA is to use cattle grazing to support the Service's conservation and resource management objectives. The Service has determined that cooperative agriculture is an appropriate, compatible, and necessary use of the Refuge to meet these objectives.

The Refuge proposes to use cattle grazing to modify vegetation structure, density, and composition on the Horse Pasture 2 and Hesse Tract units of Pixley NWR. The selected applicant will operate under a CAA as a "cooperator" with the Service. In this capacity, the cooperator will work closely with Refuge management to achieve vegetation target conditions intended to benefit plants and wildlife, especially the endangered Tipton kangaroo rat, Blunt-nosed leopard lizard, San Joaquin kit fox, and the endangered Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp. Applicants will possess the professional knowledge, aptitude, and resources to manage annual grasslands for the benefit of the aforementioned wildlife species. The cooperator is required to own all cattle grazing on the Refuge. No subleasing is allowed. The cooperator will have use of up to 399 acres in Horse Pasture 2, and 119 acres in the Hesse Tract unit of the Refuge for the 2026 season, with the option to extend for an additional 4 years.

Period of Performance

The period of performance for the CAA will be 5-years, extending from November 1, 2026 through October 31, 2031, or until either party provides at least 30 days' notice of intent to terminate the CAA. The period of performance cannot be extended beyond the 5-year period. Upon the conclusion of the 5-year period of performance, the Refuge will publish a new notice of cooperative agricultural opportunity and again issue a CAA using a competitive process based upon objective criteria.

Lease Pricing

The initial rate that will be included within the CAA will be \$10.50/AUM, with an AUM being defined as Animal Unit Equivalent (AUE) grazing for one month. For the purposes of the CAA, one Animal Unit (AU) will be defined as one mature cow, two years old and above, dry, or including a nursing calf less than 6 months of age. Initial AUE values will include those outlined in Table 1.

Annual Grazing Period

Grazing will occur annually, as long as there is enough residual dry matter (RDM) to sustain the grazing program, and when soils are sufficiently dry to prevent damage and compaction. As such, the grazing period typically begins on November 1st and extends through April 30th of the following year. The length of the annual grazing period may be adjusted (increased or decreased) and is highly dependent upon rainfall, forage availability, vegetation target conditions, infrastructure needs, and/or other unforeseen circumstances. The intent of the CAA is to establish a flexible multi-year agreement between cooperating parties that meets the management objectives of the Refuge.

Table 1: Proposed animal and class categories and associated animal unit equivalent (AUE) values.

Animal and Class	Animal Unit Equivalent (AUE)
Cow	1.00
Cow/Calf Pair	1.00
Bull	1.50
Yearling	0.80
Modified from Grazing Handbook - A Guide for Resource Managers in Coastal California (http://www.carangeland.org/images/GrazingHandbook.pdf)	

Billing Period

Billing and reconciliation of cost-sharing incentives will be administered after the end of the grazing season. Billing of grazing fees and reconciliation of cost-sharing incentives will be administered in coordination with the federal fiscal year, and will be completed in October of each year, following the end of the previous fiscal year.

Liability Insurance Requirements

The cooperator and any subcontractors will be required to maintain insurance policies with the following coverage limits. The cooperator will be required to endorse the Service as an additional insured on said insurance policies.

Workers' compensation and employer's liability

The cooperator is required to comply with applicable Federal and State workers' compensation and occupational disease statutes. If occupational diseases are not compensable under those statutes, they shall be covered under the employer's liability section of the insurance policy, except when contract operations are so commingled with a contractor's commercial operations that it would not be practical to require this coverage. Employer's liability coverage of at least \$100,000 shall be required, except in States with exclusive or monopolistic funds that do not permit workers' compensation to be written by private carriers.

General liability

(1) The USFWS requires bodily injury liability insurance coverage written on the comprehensive form of policy of at least \$500,000 per occurrence.

(2) Property damage liability insurance shall be required only in special circumstances as determined by the agency.

Automobile liability

The USFWS requires automobile liability insurance written on the comprehensive form of policy. The policy shall provide for bodily injury and property damage liability covering the operation of all

automobiles used in connection with performing the contract. Policies covering automobiles operated in the United States shall provide coverage of at least \$200,000 per person and \$500,000 per occurrence for bodily injury and \$20,000 per occurrence for property damage. The amount of liability coverage on other policies shall be commensurate with any legal requirements of the locality and sufficient to meet normal and customary claims.

Selection Process

The cooperator will be selected through an open, transparent, and competitive process, where applications will be scored and ranked based upon objective criteria (Table 2) and written responses to questions in the application. The Refuge will notify all applicants individually within 45 days after the closing of the opportunity notice.

Table 2. Selection criteria used to rank and select grazing cooperator at Pixley NWR.

Ranking Criteria	Eligibility/Ranking Score	
Ability to graze for the total length of time and recommended stocking rate or until target vegetation conditions are achieved.	Yes (eligible)	No (not eligible)
Ability to move livestock between management units or remove them from the Refuge within two days' notice.	Yes (eligible)	No (not eligible)
Ability to install, operate and maintain the necessary infrastructure to meet the needs of the grazing program, including fencing, corrals, gates, and water systems.	Yes (eligible)	No (not eligible)
Ability to install, operate and maintain the necessary infrastructure to meet the needs of the grazing program, including fencing, corrals, gates, and water systems.	Yes (eligible)	No (not eligible)
Current ownership to the equipment (e.g., trucks, trailers, fencing tools, water pumps, horses, etc.) and staff necessary to manage grazing operations and maintain and improve grazing infrastructure.	Yes (eligible)	No (not eligible)
Ability to immediately respond to emergency situations such as escaped livestock, fencing breaches, water system failures, wildfires, or other circumstances affecting public or livestock health and safety.	Yes (eligible)	No (not eligible)
Ability to inspect livestock and infrastructure on a daily basis.	Yes (eligible)	No (not eligible)
Delinquent on any prior stipulations or public lands.	Yes (eligible)	No (not eligible)

Ability to maintain liability insurance as stated above.	Yes (eligible)		No (not eligible)
Current status as a ranching cooperator on private land or a grazing lease holder on public lands.	< 5 years (1pt)	5-10 years (2pts)	> 10 years (3pts)
Experience managing livestock for plant and wildlife habitat improvement on federal or state lands.	< 5 years (1pt)	5-10 years (2pts)	> 10 years (3pts)
Experience managing livestock to conserve special status species (such as grazing habitat to benefit vernal pool fairy shrimp, blunt nosed leopard lizards, Tipton kangaroo rats, and San Joaquin kit fox).	< 5 years (1pt)	5-10 years (2pts)	> 10 years (3pts)
Experience grazing to benefit migratory species (e.g. sandhill cranes, Canada geese).	< 5 years (1pt)	5-10 years (2pts)	> 10 years (3pts)
Ability to provide in-kind services to assist the refuge in carrying out successful cooperative agriculture program (e.g. Pay contractors to fix/maintain water systems, maintaining water troughs and other infrastructure used by the cooperator).	< 5 years (1pt)	5-10 years (2pts)	> 10 years (3pts)

Pixley National Wildlife Refuge

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the primary Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish, wildlife, and plant populations, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Consisting of approximately 7,405 acres, Pixley NWR was established in 1959 to be administered under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act to provide wintering habitat for migratory birds and protect habitat for the endangered blunt-nosed leopard lizard.

Pixley NWR is home to small seasonal marsh wetlands and some of the last significant acres of Southern San Joaquin Valley Grassland habitat. This habitat provides nesting, foraging, and cover for a variety of threatened and endangered species. The refuge also consists of riparian habitat, alkali playa, vernal pool habitat, and intensively managed moist soil wetlands. Today, the Complex represents some of the largest blocks of contiguous uplands in the southern San Joaquin Valley. Resident, migratory, and threatened and endangered species, as well as native plants, continue to occur on these lands throughout the year. While some of these species are found on and use private property, their last stronghold in the southern Valley may be the Complex

Horse Pasture 1, Horse Pasture 2 and Hesse Tract units of Pixley NWR Grazing Units

Comprised of 914 acres, 396 acres in Horse Pasture 1, 399 acres in Horse Pasture 2 and 119 acres in the Hesse Tract, these units are located north of the Pixley NWR wetlands of Pixley NWR (Figure 1). Grazing activities under the CAA will be for all the acres mentioned above. **The recommended stocking rates for the 2026 season will be 35 AUM (cows per month) for Horse Pasture 1, 58 AUM (cows per month) for Horse Pasture 2, and 19 AUM (cows per month) for Hesse Tract.** Stocking rates for the following four years will be calculated each summer and given to the cooperator each August.

Horse Pasture 1 Contingency

There is an existing cooperative land management agreement with the United States Park Service to graze Federal government owned horses and mules on the Horse Pasture 1 Unit. Currently the NPS ended their horse and mule program but in the event of the program being reinstated they will have first priority of grazing the unit. If this were to happen the permittee would need to move their cattle to Horse Pasture 2 and/or Hesse Tract.

Grassland Management

The Service proposes to use seasonal grazing as a tool to reduce abundance of non-native grasses, measured by residual dry matter (RDM) surveys. Residual dry matter (RDM) surveys are conducted to assess habitat suitability for the movement of Tipton kangaroo rats and blunt-nosed leopard lizards, as well as to determine the recommended initial stocking rates that cooperators are expected to implement to the best of their ability. Refuge management and the cooperator will work closely together to achieve vegetation targets. If the grazing objectives are not being met, the Refuge reserves the right to modify or terminate the CAA. Operations will generally occur from November through April of each year, although the specific timing of grazing will often be influenced by precipitation and growing conditions.

The uplands at the above mentioned units are typically dominated by nonnative annual grasses including foxtail barley, low barley, soft chess, and red brome. Common forbs in this community include red-stemmed filaree, California burclover, bush seepweed, common spikeweed, bird's eye gilia, and alkali heath. Soil type has an important influence on the composition and structure of the grassland community.

Figure 1. Pixley National Wildlife Refuge Complex with grazing units highlighted.

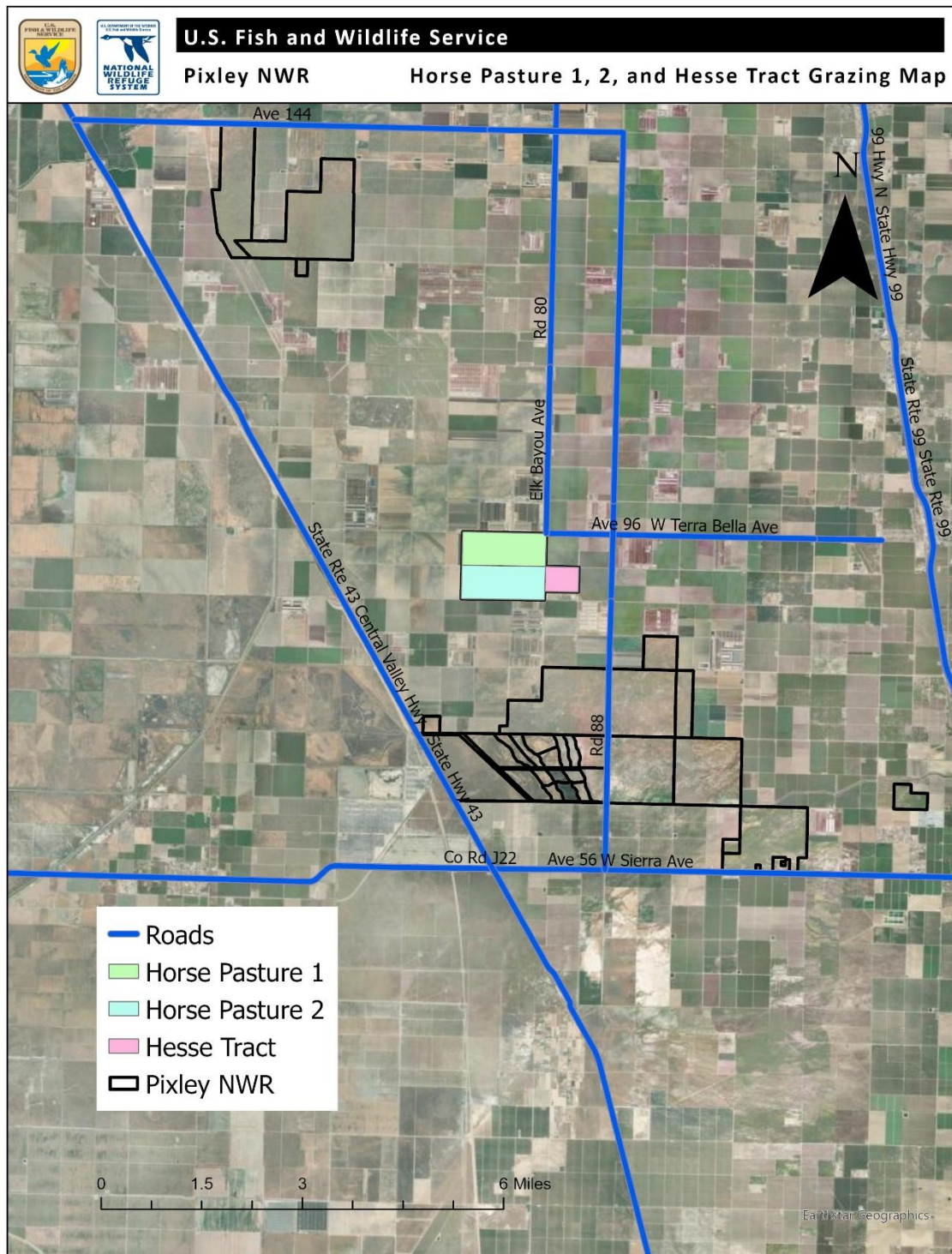
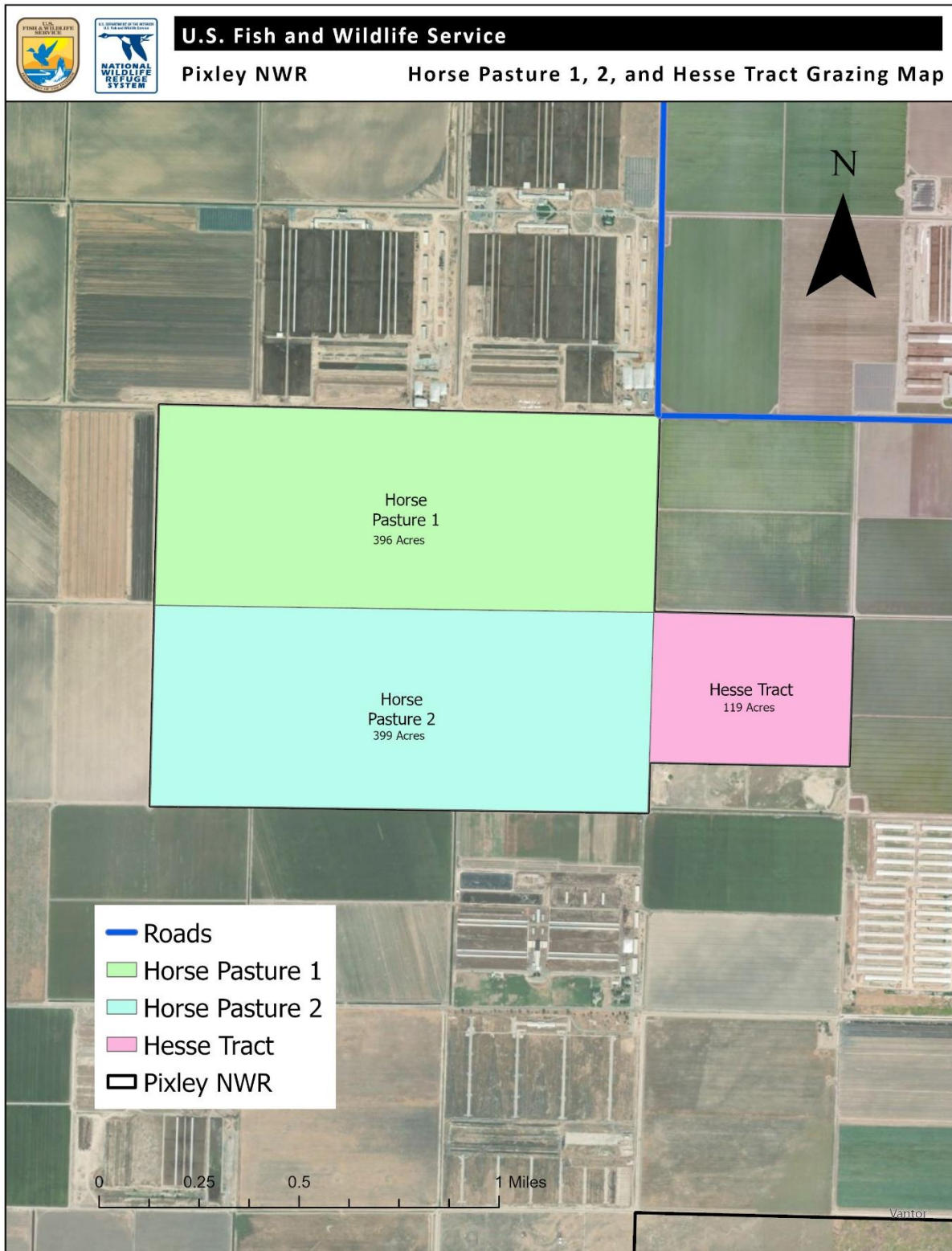


Figure 2. Zoomed grazing units with acres.



Infrastructure

The Horse Pasture 1 and Hesse Tract units of Pixley NWR are located in Tulare County, 5.6 miles west of the town of Pixley. Access to the units would be at the corner of W Terra Bella Ave. (Ave. 96) and Elk Bayou Ave. (Rd. 80). The grazing units mentioned above include an extensive and well-established system of fencing, gates, water pipes, and troughs. Each unit has access to water from a well located in the North West corner of Horse Pasture 1.

As part of the grazing program, the cooperator will be responsible for upgrades and maintenance of all grazing infrastructure. As such, the cooperator will be expected to participate in a cost-sharing program, where maintenance related expenses such as equipment, supplies, and labor will be deducted from annual grazing fees per Service guidelines (Table 3). Infrastructure repair, associated supplies, and labor will also be deducted from annual grazing fees. Cooperator will be required to submit copies of all receipts and expenditures along with a summary of those expenses.

The grazing cooperator may also propose maintenance or infrastructure projects on the Refuge, and following the approval of Refuge management, the cost of such projects will be deducted from annual grazing fees.

Table 3. Proposed cost-sharing management activities and associated deductions values.

Management Activity	Cost-Share Deduction Value (hourly rate)
¹ Use of personal heavy equipment.	\$80.00
² Labor	\$25.00
¹ Use of heavy equipment may include, but not limited to, backhoe and skid steer for infrastructure improvements, repairs, and maintenance.	
² Labor will vary widely, but generally include activities related to infrastructure improvements, repairs, and maintenance.	

Historical Land Use

Historic records indicate that the western portion of the Pixley Refuge had been extensively cultivated while the eastern areas were used primarily as grazing land. Farming was abandoned on the lands that became the Refuge for an unknown reason, possibly increased soil salinity. When the Refuge was established, farming had ceased. Certain units still show evidence of cultivation and irrigation or drainage ditches and small reservoirs.

Approximately 3,180 acres of uplands were acquired during the Refuge's initial acquisition phase. With passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1973, even more importance was placed on managing the uplands for endangered species and an additional 2,230 acres was acquired. To further help the endangered species in the uplands the Refuge established a grazing program with cattle supplied by permittees. Refuge staff annually monitor the amount of grass remaining in the units after the cattle are removed to ensure that the unit meets its habitat requirements and goals for the endangered species.

Climate and Weather

The southern San Joaquin Valley is very dry and categorized as desert climate. The hot season lasts for about 3.5 months from June through September. The average daily high temperature for Alpaugh, California, just west of the Refuge, during the hot season is 90 °F. The hottest month of the year is July with an average high of 98 °F and an average low of 64 °F. The cool season lasts for 3 months from late November through February and is characterized by dense tule fog. The average daily high temperature during the cool season is below 65 °F. The coldest month is December with an average low of 38 °F and high of 58 °F. The average annual precipitation is 8 inches. The wetter season lasts 5 months from November 10 to April 12. Temperatures range from average lows near 38 °F in the cool season to average highs of 98 °F during the hot season.