

News Release

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Drought conditions at Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex and potential impacts to recreation opportunities

Willows, Calif.— As migratory birds start to return to the Central Valley, visitors to the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex including Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter refuges will see a drastic reduction in wetland habitat which may impact public use on the four refuges.

This is the third year of drought, and as a result, Sacramento, Delevan, and Colusa National Wildlife Refuges have received a 55% reduction in water allocations this year. Consequently, we expect to have enough water to fill and maintain approximately half of our wetland units at these refuges.

Given the decreased water allocation, we are reducing the number of wetlands we will flood and targeting wetland units determined to maximize efficient water use and are the best habitat based on documented bird use. We plan to flood wetlands from September through November and expect to have most of the targeted wetlands flooded by the middle of November.

In addition to reduced habitat on refuges, rice production was very low on the west side of the Sacramento Valley and there will be very little flooded agricultural habitat available on private lands within the vicinity of the refuges. Similarly, there is very little water available to flood privately-owned wetlands adjacent to the refuges.

Potential impacts to recreation

We expect to observe high concentrations of migratory birds using the reduced footprint of wetlands and flooded rice lands on the west side of the Sacramento Valley, which may increase potential avian disease outbreaks. As migratory birds have already started to arrive, we are closely monitoring potential impacts from Avian Influenza and Avian Botulism.

- If disease impacts increase, we may close or reduce public use on refuges to minimize disturbance and reduce concentrations of migratory birds.
- If disease occurrence remains low, we will keep the auto tours and walking trails open at Sacramento and Colusa National Wildlife Refuges. Similarly, we will open Sacramento,

Colusa, and Delevan National Wildlife Refuges to hunting, however, we do not anticipate being able to open until the middle of November when we will have approximately 50% of wetlands flooded.

- Due to the 50% reduction in flooded wetland acres at Sacramento, Delevan, and Colusa National Wildlife Refuges, we will have reduced hunter quotas this year.
- Sutter National Wildlife Refuge is also experiencing severe water shortages and it is not known when enough wetland habitat will be available to open the refuge to hunting. Water availability is dependent on natural stream flows and hunting will not open until winter rains allow us to flood at least 50% of refuge wetlands. We do not anticipate closing the seasonal trails (February 15 – June 30) at Sutter National Wildlife Refuge.

The Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex annually welcomes over 225,000 visitors each year. The complex is an important destination for wildlife enthusiasts, who come to the refuges to participate in premier opportunities that include photography, wildlife observation, and hunting. This will be a challenging year as we balance the priority of providing critical islands of habitat within the Pacific Flyway, while also providing recreational opportunities for the public. We encourage visitors to visit <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/sacramento> for continuing updates through the fall and winter of 2022.