



# Butte Sink, Willow Creek-Lurline, and North Central Valley Wildlife Management Areas

## Planning Update #3 – February 2015

### Greetings from the Project Leader

This is the third Planning Update from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to help keep you informed and involved regarding the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Butte Sink, Willow Creek-Lurline, and North Central Valley Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). The last planning update we distributed regarding the CCP was over four years ago. Work on this project was suspended by other priorities; however, we recognize the importance of the CCP and are once again turning our attention to it. The goal of this Planning Update is to revisit and describe the WMA CCP and explain where we currently are in the CCP process.

In our first two planning updates we asked for your input on the future

management of the three WMAs and then summarized the comments received during the initial scoping period for the CCP. After careful consideration of input we received, the CCP planning team has developed preliminary management alternatives for the WMAs, which are summarized in this update. The management alternatives, along with corresponding objectives and strategies, will focus on accomplishing the purposes for which the WMAs were established and fulfilling the mission of the Refuge System. We are now preparing the Draft CCP and accompanying environmental assessment that will analyze the management alternatives.

With your help, we have made progress on the CCP. However, we still have much

work to do and your input throughout the remainder of the CCP process will be equally valuable.

Another planning update will be distributed when the Draft CCP is available for review, but please check our website for updates prior to that time or to view previous planning updates at: [www.fws.gov/refuge/sacramento/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/sacramento/).

Thank you for your continued interest and support in this important planning process.

Daniel W. Frisk, Project Leader  
Sacramento National Wildlife  
Refuge Complex

### CCP progress

- Pre-planning
- Public Scoping and Identify Issues
- Develop Draft Vision Statement and Goals
- Develop Draft Alternatives, Objectives and Strategies
- Prepare Draft CCP/EA
- Public Review of Draft CCP/EA
- Prepare Final CCP/EA
- Public Notice of Decision

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*Address correction requested*

### An update on CCP progress

As shown above, the alternatives development phase is now complete. Since we distributed Planning Update #2, the CCP planning team has developed and analyzed draft alternatives for managing the WMAs.

Our next step is to prepare a Draft CCP and environmental assessment, which refines the draft vision statement and goals and develops objectives and strategies for the WMAs with consideration of the issues identified during the public and internal scoping processes.

Comments are welcome any time during the planning process, and there will be additional opportunities for input during the formal public review period for the Draft CCP, scheduled for mid-2015.

## Who We Are and What We Do

The Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex) is located in the northern Central Valley and consists of five national wildlife refuges (Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, Sutter and Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuges) and three WMAs (Butte Sink, Willow Creek-Lurline, and North Central Valley WMAs) that protect nearly 65,000 acres of wetland, upland and riparian forest habitat important to migratory birds, endangered species and other fish and wildlife. The Complex lands represent a significant portion of the remaining

wetland habitat in the Central Valley and play a critical role in supporting the Pacific Flyway's wintering waterfowl population.

In accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, the Complex has been developing CCPs to guide the future management of its lands. The Complex has already completed CCPs for Sacramento River National Wild Refuge (2005) and Sacramento, Delevan, Colusa, and Sutter National Wildlife Refuges (2009). The CCP now being developed includes only the Butte Sink, Willow Creek-Lurline and the North Central Valley WMAs.

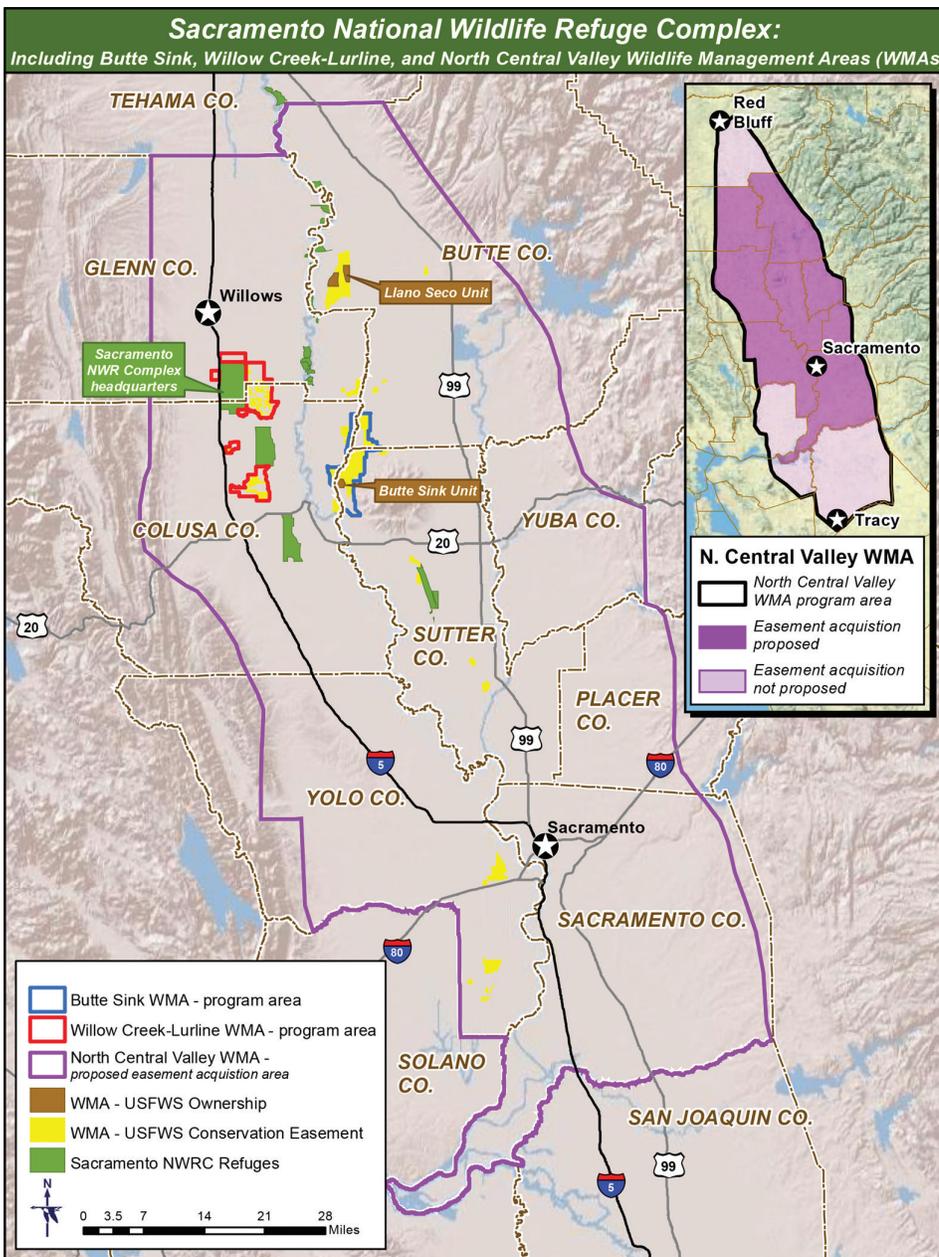
The WMAs differ from the National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) in that they consist primarily of private wetlands protected with conservation easements and secondarily of Service-owned lands. The following briefly describes the three WMAs:

### Butte Sink WMA

The Butte Sink WMA is located in Butte, Colusa, and Sutter counties and consists of 733 acres of Service-owned lands and 35 conservation easements on approximately 10,260 acres of private wetlands. Located immediately west of the Sutter Butte Mountain Range, Butte Sink WMA represents the largest contiguous block of wetlands in the Sacramento Valley. The Butte Sink WMA was established in 1979 with the primary purpose of preserving native wetland habitat to perpetuate the migratory waterfowl resource in the Central Valley and the Pacific Flyway. The Service's acquisition objective of 11,000 acres for the Butte Sink WMA has been met.

### Willow Creek-Lurline WMA

The Willow Creek-Lurline WMA is located in Colusa and Glenn counties and currently consists of 85 conservation easements on approximately 5,859 acres of private wetlands. The wetlands of the Willow Creek-Lurline WMA provide an important wildlife corridor of natural





*Pintails in rice lands.*

*Photo: USFWS*

habitat helping to link Sacramento, Delevan and Colusa NWRs. The Willow Creek-Lurline WMA was established in 1985 with the primary purpose of preserving wetland habitat for wintering waterfowl and other wetland-dependent wildlife. The existing approved acquisition objective for the Willow Creek-Lurline WMA is 8,000 acres of conservation easements.

### **North Central Valley WMA**

The North Central Valley WMA was established in 1991 to preserve existing and restored wetlands for waterfowl and other wetland dependent wildlife and plants. The North Central Valley WMA is seen as an integral component in achieving the habitat protection and restoration goals of the Central Valley Joint Venture and ultimately the waterfowl population objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

The North Central Valley WMA has an existing acquisition boundary that includes 11 counties (Butte, Colusa, Contra Costa, Glenn, Placer, San Joaquin, Solano, Sutter, Tehama, Yolo and Yuba) and encompasses most of the Valley floor from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to Red Buff. Although within the boundary of the WMA, Sacramento County was not included in the project. Currently, the North Central Valley WMA is active in

Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Sutter, and Yolo counties, and consists of approximately 1,732 acres of Service-owned lands and 28 conservation easements on approximately 14,740 acres of private lands. The existing approved acquisition objective for the North Central Valley WMA is 48,750 acres of conservation easements and 6,250 acres of Service-owned lands, with individual acreage objectives for each of the 11 counties involved.

### **Draft CCP Vision Statement and Goals**

In Planning Update #2, we provided the draft CCP vision statement and goals for the WMAs. The revised draft vision statement and goals are as follows.

#### **Draft CCP Vision Statement**

“Butte Sink, Willow Creek-Lurline, and North Central Valley Wildlife Management Areas help to conserve an important network of private and public wetland, upland, and riparian habitats in the Central Valley of California. This network protects some of the most important wintering areas for waterfowl in the Pacific Flyway and North America. These lands also protect and enhance habitat for other migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, and resident wildlife.

Through cooperation with landowners and other conservation partners, the

Wildlife Management Areas are one of the premier examples in the nation of private land partnerships promoting fish and wildlife conservation.

Environmental education and compatible wildlife-dependent recreation on appropriate Service-owned lands within the Wildlife Management Areas foster a greater understanding and appreciation of Central Valley wetland ecosystems and the National Wildlife Refuge System.”

### **Draft CCP Goals**

#### **GOAL 1: Land Protection**

Protect wetlands, wetland-associated uplands and riparian habitats, and productive agricultural lands to support an abundance and natural diversity of wintering and migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, birds of prey, songbirds, and other wetland-dependent species in the Central Valley.

#### **GOAL 2: Wildlife and Habitat**

Conserve, manage, restore, and enhance habitats and associated wildlife and plant species, with an emphasis on supporting an abundance and natural diversity of wintering and migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, other waterbirds, birds of prey, and songbirds.

#### **GOAL 3: Visitor Services**

On the Llano Seco Unit and other appropriate Service-owned lands, provide visitors of all ages and abilities with quality wildlife-dependent recreation (wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation) and volunteer opportunities to enhance public appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment of fish, wildlife, habitats, and cultural resources.

#### **GOAL 4: Threatened and Endangered Species**

Support self-sustaining populations of threatened and endangered species on fee-title Service-owned lands and on easement lands with willing landowners.

#### **GOAL 5: Climate Change**

Maintain and enhance current habitat values under anticipated climate change scenarios in the Central Valley.



*Butte Sink Wildlife Management Area.*

*Photo: USFWS*

## Highlights of the Management Alternatives

The draft environmental assessment (EA) for the Draft CCP will analyze three alternatives for managing the Butte Sink, Willow Creek-Lurline, and North Central Valley (NCV) WMAs. The following provides highlights from the alternatives that will be proposed in the Draft CCP/EA.

### Alternative A

Under Alternative A (the no action alternative), we would continue to manage the WMAs as we have in the recent past. Conservation easements would be used as a voluntary, cost effective tool to protect habitat while maintaining private ownership and management.

No additional acquisition would take place in the Butte Sink WMA. Up to 2,141 acres of wetland easements could be acquired from willing landowners to protect wetlands in Willow Creek-Lurline WMA. Up to 34,043 acres of wetland easements could be acquired from willing landowners in NCV WMA *excluding* Sacramento County. Under Alternative A, there would be no agricultural easements in the WMAs. The Service could acquire up to 3,321 additional acres of Service-owned lands from willing landowners in the NCV WMA. The Service would consult with affected counties prior to the acquisition of any new Service-owned lands.

Under all alternatives, on Llano Seco Unit and other appropriate Service-owned lands, we would provide visitors of all ages and abilities with quality wildlife-dependent recreation, and volunteer opportunities to enhance public appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment of fish, wildlife, habitats, and cultural resources.

### Alternative B

Wetland easement acquisition goals under Alternative B would remain the same as Alternative A. The only proposed change in wetland easement acquisition would take place in the NCV WMA, where objectives would be modified to include Sacramento County. Under Alternative B, a voluntary agricultural easement program would also be added to the NCV WMA to protect farmland that provides important migratory bird habitat and/or open space buffers to existing protected wetlands. Up to 30,700 acres of agricultural easements could be acquired from willing landowners in Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Sacramento, Sutter, and Yolo counties. As with Alternative A, the Service could acquire up to 3,321 additional acres of Service-owned lands from willing landowners in the NCV WMA.

### Alternative C

Under Alternative C (the preferred alternative), the wetland easement acquisition goals for the Butte Sink WMA and the Willow Creek-Lurline

WMA would remain the same as Alternatives A and B. In Alternative C, the Service is proposing to reduce its existing, NCV WMA wetland easement acquisition objective from 34,043 acres to 15,000 acres. The Service is also proposing to limit wetland easement acquisition to Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Placer, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba counties. In addition, the Service proposes to add an agricultural easement program to the NCV WMA. Under this scenario, up to 19,043 acres (the difference between the existing NCV WMA wetland easement acreage objective and the Alternative C NCV WMA wetland easement acreage objective) of agricultural easements could be acquired from willing landowners to protect farmland in Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Sacramento, Sutter, and Yolo counties. As with Alternatives A and B, the Service could acquire up to 3,321 additional acres of Service-owned lands from willing landowners in the NCV WMA.

## For More Information

Updates are periodically distributed throughout the CCP/EA process when new information is available. Please check our website for updates and previously released documents at:

[www.fws.gov/refuge/sacramento/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/sacramento/)

We are available to provide additional information about CCP accomplishments to date and to answer any questions about the planning process. Please feel free to contact us.

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