



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Pacific Southwest Region
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2606
Sacramento, California 95825-1846

In Response Reply To:
FWS/R8/NWRS/RPL

Supervisor William O'brien
1010 10th Street, Suite 6500
Modesto, CA 95354

May 22 2011

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
MAY - 4 11 A 11:00

Dear Supervisor O'brien,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is initiating the planning process for the proposed California Foothills Legacy Area (CFLA). CFLA is a proposed new easement program to protect working landscapes focused on rangelands surrounding California's Central Valley. This initiative was developed in cooperation with the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition (CRCC), a group of over 100 agricultural organizations, environmental interest groups, as well as state and federal agencies including California Cattlemen's Association, California Farm Bureau Federation, Defenders of Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Game, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. The goal of the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition is to collaboratively work together to protect and enhance the rangeland landscape that encircles California's Central Valley.

California rangelands include a rich and varied landscape of grasslands, oak woodlands, vernal pools, riparian areas and wetlands, which support numerous imperiled species, many native plants once common in the Central Valley, and are home to the highest diversity and density of wintering raptors anywhere in North America.

These rangelands, and the species that rely on these habitats, largely persist today due to the positive and experienced grazing and other land stewardship practices of the ranchers that have owned and managed these lands and are committed to a healthy future for their working landscapes. California rangelands are a critical foundation of the economic and social fabric of California's ranching industry and rural communities, and will only continue to provide this important working landscape for California's plants, fish and wildlife if private rangelands remain in ranching.

However, many rangelands are located in California's fastest-growing counties and are at significant risk of conversion to development and other uses. Between 1984 and 2006, over 400,000 acres of rangeland in California were lost to development. Recent State cuts in Williamson Act subvention payments to counties also pose a serious threat to rangelands.

The Service is just beginning the planning process for the proposed establishment of a new voluntary easement program. We have identified four preliminary focal areas and one or more



of these areas fall within or near your district. A map on the back of the enclosed fact sheet shows the location of the preliminary focal areas. The fact sheet and the enclosed Q&A provide more information on the proposed CFLA.

The planning process for the CFLA will include National Environmental Policy Act compliance and have a number of opportunities for public comment. Currently, we are seeking input from the public on the number, location, and size of the focal areas and the scope of issues to address in the environmental assessment. We will hold a series of public meetings during late May/early June to facilitate this input. Dates, times and locations of these meetings will be announced in a newsletter and press releases to be distributed during the next few weeks.

We will be contacting you shortly to provide additional details and answer any questions you might have. In the meantime, if you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (916) 414-6504.

Sincerely,



Mark Pelz
Chief, Refuge Planning
Pacific Southwest Region

Enclosures



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

California Foothills Legacy Area

Protecting California's Rangelands

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is initiating the planning process for the proposed California Foothills Legacy Area (CFLA). CFLA is a proposed new easement program to protect working landscapes developed in cooperation with the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition and is focused on rangelands surrounding California's Central Valley. The planning process will take approximately 18 months to complete.

Several organizations are acquiring easements within the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition boundary. To complement these efforts, the FWS has identified four preliminary focal areas using landscape-level GIS modeling and is considering establishing a new easement program focused on these areas. The focal areas are predicted hotspots of richness and abundance for migratory birds and threatened and endangered species.

Lands within the proposed CFLA are predominantly private working range-

lands that include a rich and varied landscape of grasslands, oak savannah, and oak woodlands. Other important habitats imbedded within this landscape include vernal pools, riparian areas, and wetlands.

Together, these habitats support a breathtaking diversity of wildlife. California's rangeland habitats are some of the least protected in California yet they support an extraordinarily high number of imperiled species. A total of 197 federally-listed threatened and endangered species have documented occurrences within California's grassland, oak savanna, and oak woodland habitats yet they only account for 18 percent of the State's total land area. These three habitats in California alone have more listed species than any other state in the US outside Hawaii.

California's rangelands are also critically important to migratory birds. Oak woodlands in the State may rank among the

top three habitat types in North America for bird richness and California's oak savanna and grasslands support the highest diversity and density of wintering raptors anywhere in North America.

Rangelands represent one of the most threatened habitats throughout the western United States. Intact, privately-owned rangelands face threats from increased low density, rural residential housing development in the foothills and conversion to other uses. Between 1984 and 2006, over 400,000 acres of rangeland in California were lost to development. Within 50 years, it is estimated that rural residential development (densities > 20 acres/unit) within the study area will increase by nearly 1 million acres.

Establishing the CFLA, together with the work of numerous partner agencies and NGOs will make a significant contribution to conserving California's last great landscape – private-owned rangelands.

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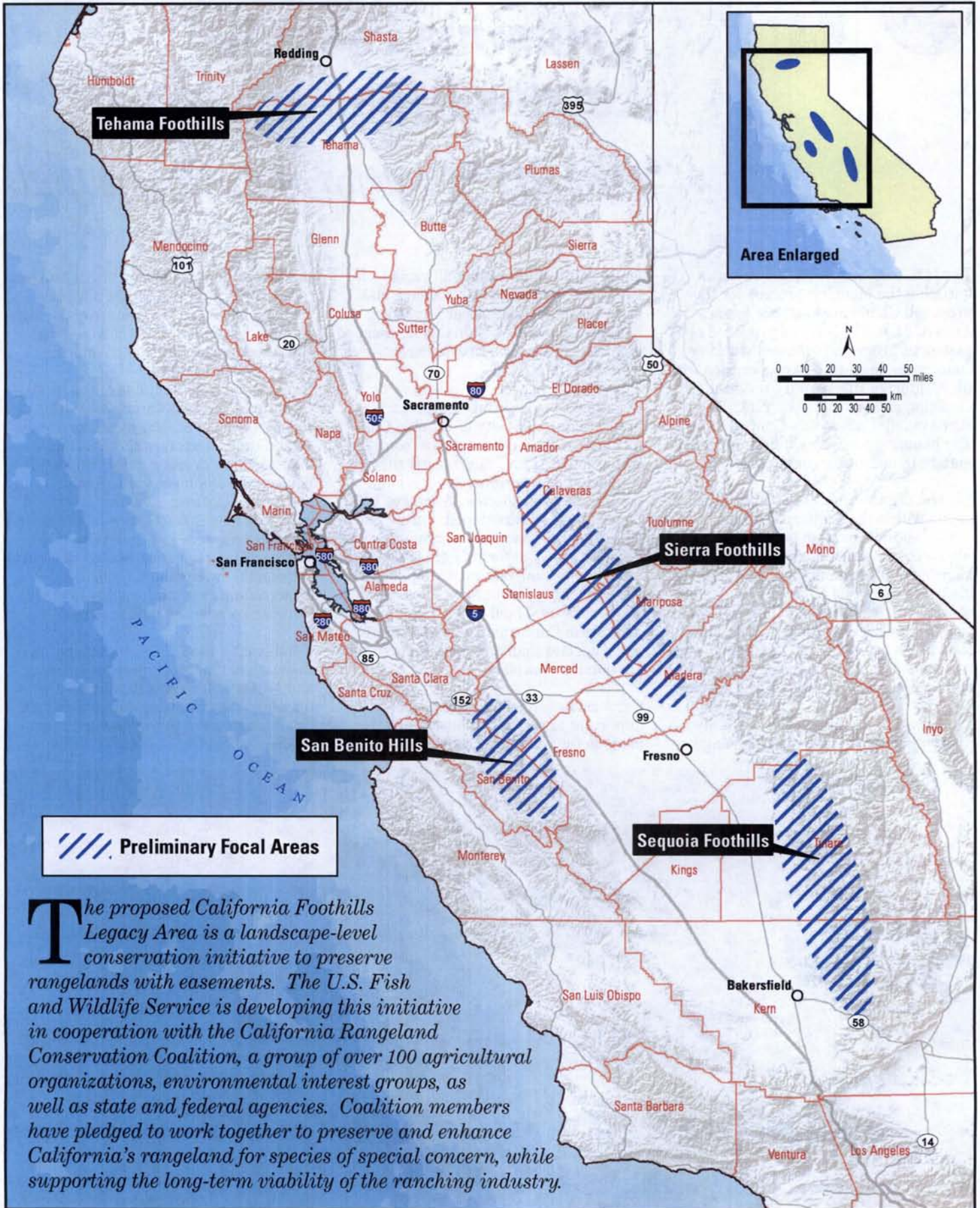




U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Proposed California Foothills Legacy Area

Preliminary Focal Areas



 Preliminary Focal Areas

The proposed California Foothills Legacy Area is a landscape-level conservation initiative to preserve rangelands with easements. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing this initiative in cooperation with the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition, a group of over 100 agricultural organizations, environmental interest groups, as well as state and federal agencies. Coalition members have pledged to work together to preserve and enhance California's rangeland for species of special concern, while supporting the long-term viability of the ranching industry.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

California Foothills Legacy Area

Questions and Answers

What is the California Foothills Legacy Area?

The California Foothills Legacy Area (CFLA) is a proposed new easement program to protect working landscapes distributed across four focal areas in the foothills surrounding California's Central Valley. This initiative was developed in cooperation with the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition (CRCC), a group of over 100 agricultural organizations, environmental interest groups, as well as state and federal agencies including California Cattlemen's Association, California Farm Bureau Federation, Defenders of Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Game, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Service's Pacific Southwest Region and other coalition members have pledged to work together in the CRCC to preserve and enhance California's rangeland for species of special concern, while

supporting the long-term viability of the ranching industry.

The four focal areas are predicted hotspots of richness and abundance for migratory birds and threatened and endangered species in the Sierra Foothills, Sequoia Foothills, Tehama Foothills and the San Benito Hills. Lands within the proposed CFLA are predominantly private working rangelands that include a rich and varied landscape of grasslands, oak savanna, oak woodlands, vernal pools, riparian areas, and wetlands, which support a breathtaking diversity of wildlife including many imperiled species.

Why Conserve California Rangelands?

California rangelands, including grassland, oak woodland, and oak savanna, are critically important to migratory birds and support numerous threatened and endangered species. Oak woodlands in California rank among the top three habitat types in North America for bird richness and California's oak savanna and grasslands support the highest diversity and density of wintering raptors anywhere in North America.

A total of 197 federally-listed threatened and endangered species have documented occurrences within California's grassland, oak savanna, and oak woodland habitats yet they only account for 18 percent of the State's total land area. These three habitats in California alone have more listed species than any other state in the U.S. outside of Hawaii.

California rangelands are among the least protected and most threatened habitats in the State. Intact, privately-owned rangelands face threats from increased low density, rural residential housing development in the foothills and conversion to other uses. Between 1984 and 2006, over 400,000 acres of rangeland in California were lost to development.

Within 50 years, it is estimated that rural residential development (densities > 20 acres/unit) within the study area will increase by nearly 1 million acres.

Loss of California's premier agricultural land protection tool – the Williamson Act – would also threaten critical wildlife habitat, a UC Davis survey of California cattle ranchers has shown. The same study found that 43 percent of the 10 million acres of “non-prime” land protected in the Williamson Act program and used primarily for cattle grazing is also critical for statewide conservation goals. Loss of Williamson Act funding at the state level would put critical habitat at risk for development. Without the tax relief, 42 percent of the surveyed ranchers said they would sell some or all of their rangeland. Fifty-six percent of the ranchers predict their sold land would be developed for non-agricultural uses.

Why is the Proposed CFLA Limited to Easements?

California rangelands, and the numerous species that rely on these habitats, largely persist today due to the grazing and other land stewardship practices of the ranchers that have owned and managed these lands and are committed to a healthy future for their working landscapes. California rangelands are a critical foundation of the economic and social fabric of California's ranching industry and rural communities, and will only continue to provide this important working landscape for California's plants, fish and wildlife if private rangelands remain in ranching.

Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements between landowners and government agencies or qualified conservation organizations. These easements limit the type and amount of development that may take place on a property in the future. Service easements are perpetual



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and typically prohibit subdivision and commercial development activities but allow for continued agricultural uses such as livestock grazing. Conservation easements not only protect important wildlife habitat but also help maintain the working ranches and agricultural lifestyle of the area.

Under conservation easements, the land ownership and property rights including control of public access would remain with the participating landowner. In addition, participating properties remain on local tax rolls.

Given Current Budget Constraints, How Can the Service Afford to Establish New Refuges?

The planning process now underway will determine if new refuge acquisition boundaries should be established. If a refuge is established, easements would be acquired only from willing sellers and when funding becomes available.

We anticipate that funds for easement acquisition within the CFLA would come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which is appropriated by Congress.

Though LWCF funding for acquisition varies from year to year and may not be available at all during some years, it is important to view land acquisition as a long term project. For many refuges, acquisition occurs over many years or even decades. The Service's Pacific Southwest Region has also been successful at leveraging other sources of funding for land acquisition (state, NGOs, etc).

How Can the Public Get Involved in the Planning Process?

The planning process for the CFLA will include National Environmental Policy Act compliance and will have a number of opportunities for public comment. Currently, we are seeking input from the public on the number, location, and

size of the focal areas and the scope of issues to address in the environmental assessment. We will hold a series of public meetings during late May/early June to facilitate this input. Dates, times and locations of these meetings will be announced in a newsletter and press releases to be distributed during the next few weeks.



April 2011





United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Pacific Southwest Region
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2606
Sacramento, California 95825-1846

In Response Reply To:
FWS/R8/NWRS/RPL

Supervisor Jim DeMartini
1010 10th Street, Suite 6500
Modesto, CA 95354

May 3, 2011

Dear Supervisor DeMartini,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is initiating the planning process for the proposed expansion of the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The proposed expansion presents a unique conservation opportunity to restore a major migratory corridor through the center of California to benefit the birds of the Pacific Flyway and numerous other wildlife species. The planning process will take approximately 18 months to complete.

The Service is studying two segments along the San Joaquin River. The northern portion of the study area includes a reach of the San Joaquin River from the existing boundary of the San Joaquin River Refuge north to a point west of Manteca, where the River divides into three segments: Paradise Cut, Old River, and the San Joaquin River. The southern portion lies between the Refuge and the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge. Expanding the boundary would allow the Service to acquire lands and develop conservation agreements with willing landowners.

The proposed expansion would connect the Refuge with the Grasslands Ecological Area, a 160,000-acre mosaic of Central Valley floor habitats located in the historic floodplain of the San Joaquin River. Maintaining connectivity between the remaining natural areas and minimizing further fragmentation is crucial to the long term viability of California's natural heritage.

Although currently degraded, the San Joaquin River basin once supported a highly diverse ecosystem. Historic impacts, such as gravel mining, construction of dams and diversions, and habitat clearing, dewatered the river and destroyed the surrounding wetlands that used to span a wide swath of the valley floor. Current threats, especially habitat destruction and insufficient water supply, continue to degrade the river and can derail efforts to bring the river back to life. Today, the San Joaquin River is one of the most highly-altered systems in the state.

Through the proposed boundary expansion, the Service seeks to build on the success of its existing refuges and those of its many partners to conserve and restore fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats along San Joaquin River for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS



The planning process for the Refuge will include National Environmental Policy Act compliance and have a number of opportunities for public comment. Currently, we are seeking input from the public on the scope of issues to address in the environmental assessment. We will hold a series of public meetings during early June to facilitate this input. Dates, times and locations of these meetings will be announced in a newsletter and press releases to be distributed during the next few weeks.

We will be contacting you shortly to provide additional details and answer any questions you might have. If you have any immediate questions or concerns, please contact Richard Smith at (916) 414-6502, or richard_smith@fws.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Pelz', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark Pelz
Chief, Refuge Planning
Pacific Southwest Region

Enclosures



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge

Protecting and Restoring the San Joaquin River Riparian Corridor

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is initiating the planning process for the proposed expansion of the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge. The proposed expansion presents a unique conservation opportunity to restore a major migratory corridor through the center of California to benefit the birds of the Pacific Flyway and numerous other wildlife. The planning process will take approximately 18 months to complete.

The Service is studying two segments along the San Joaquin River. The northern portion of the study area includes a reach of the San Joaquin River from the existing boundary of the San Joaquin River Refuge north to a point west of Manteca, where the River divides into three segments: Paradise Cut, Old River, and the San Joaquin River. The southern portion lies between the Refuge and the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge. Expanding the boundary would allow the Service to acquire lands and develop

conservation agreements with willing landowners.

The proposed expansion would connect the Refuge with the Grasslands Ecological Area, a 160,000-acre mosaic of Central Valley floor habitats located in the historic floodplain of the San Joaquin River. This vast network of freshwater marshes, alkali grassland and riparian thickets is the result of decades of collaborative conservation involving private duck clubs, CA State Parks, CA Department of Fish and Game, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Maintaining connectivity between the remaining natural areas and minimizing further fragmentation is crucial to the long term viability of California's natural heritage.

Although currently degraded, the San Joaquin River basin once supported a highly diverse ecosystem. The valley floor was composed of a complex matrix

of channels, swales, ridges, flood basins, and sloughs that were periodically inundated and supported a great diversity of permanent and seasonal wetlands, riparian scrub and forest, and aquatic habitat teeming with fish and wildlife. These seasonal and permanent freshwater marsh and wetlands were, and continue to be, important habitat for migratory birds of the Pacific Flyway. Tens of millions of migratory waterfowl darkened the skies each winter. Nearly 50,000 acres of riparian forest rich with neotropical migratory birds and unique small mammal species flanked the streams and rivers in the basin. Historically, the San Joaquin River's Chinook salmon runs accounted for up to 40 percent (over 300,000) of the San Joaquin Valley's total Chinook salmon.

Historic impacts, such as gravel mining, construction of dams and diversions, and habitat clearing, dewatered the river and destroyed the surrounding wetlands that used to span a wide swath of the valley floor. Current threats, especially habitat destruction and insufficient water supply, continue to degrade the river and can derail efforts to bring the river back to life. Today, the San Joaquin River is one of the most highly-altered systems in the state. For decades, the diversion of water from the San Joaquin has caused at least 20 miles of the River to be dry for much of the year and nearly all of the riparian vegetation has been cleared. Less than 10 percent of historic riparian habitat exists and wetland habitats have shrunk to roughly five percent of their former extent. This loss of habitat has had substantial effects on migratory and resident bird populations.

Through the proposed boundary expansion, the Service seeks to build on the success of its existing refuges and those of its many partners to conserve and restore fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats along San Joaquin River for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.



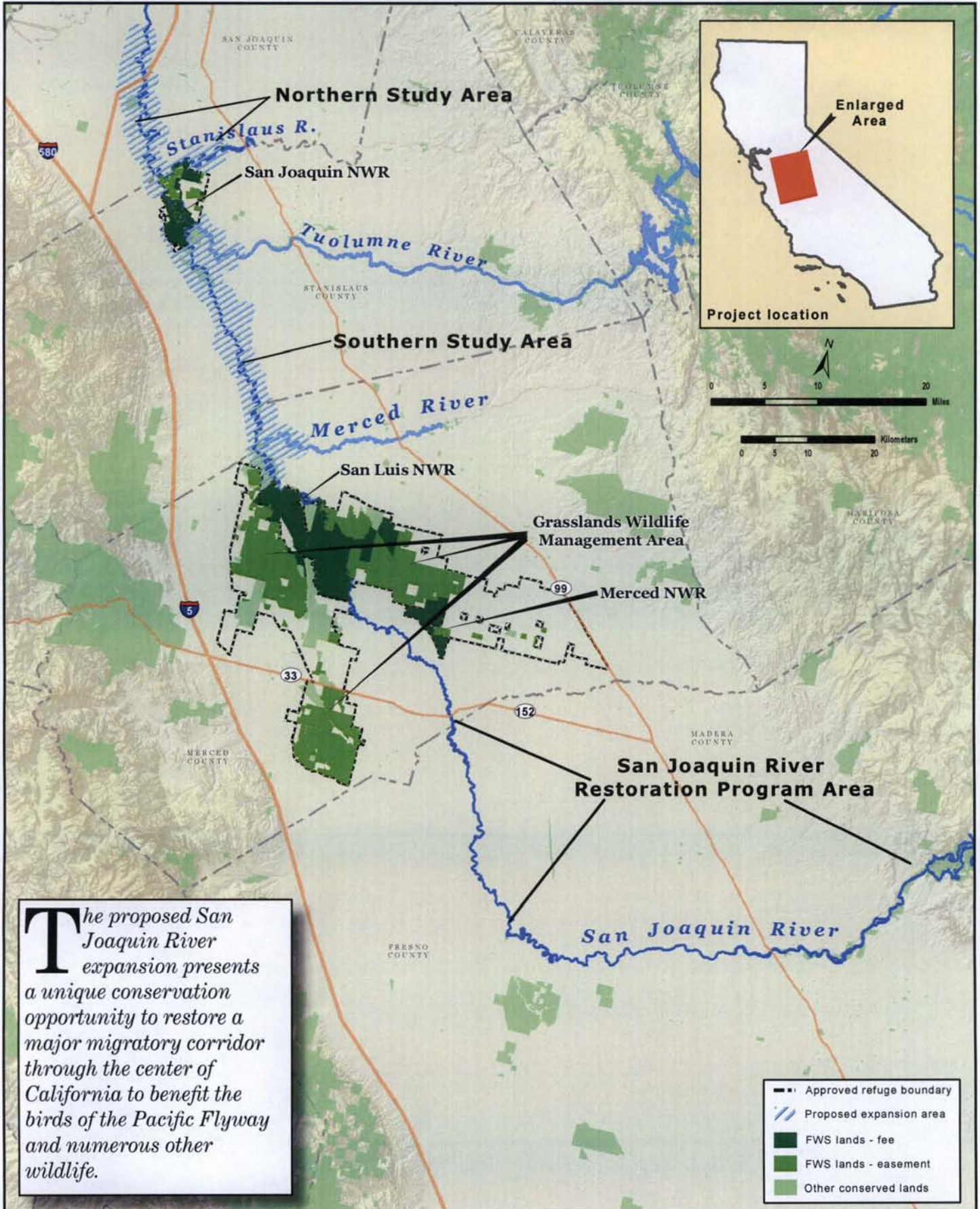


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge

San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Fresno and Madera Counties, CA

Proposed Expansion



The proposed San Joaquin River expansion presents a unique conservation opportunity to restore a major migratory corridor through the center of California to benefit the birds of the Pacific Flyway and numerous other wildlife.



In Response Reply To:
FWS/R8/NWRS/RPL

2011 MAY -5 A 10: 26

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Pacific Southwest Region
2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2606
Sacramento, California 95825-1846



Supervisor Vito Chiesa
1010 10th Street, Suite 6500
Modesto, CA 95354

May 3, 2011

Dear Supervisor Chiesa,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is initiating the planning process for two proposed projects designed to protect habitat for fish and wildlife. The first, California Foothills Legacy Area (CFLA), is a proposed new easement program to protect working landscapes focused on rangelands surrounding California's Central Valley. The second is a proposed expansion of the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). Below is a summary of each proposal.

California Foothill Legacy Area

The CFLA proposal was developed in cooperation with the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition (CRCC), a group of over 100 agricultural organizations, environmental interest groups, as well as state and federal agencies including California Cattlemen's Association, California Farm Bureau Federation, Defenders of Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Game, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. The goal of the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition is to collaboratively work together to protect and enhance the rangeland landscape that encircles California's Central Valley.

California rangelands include a rich and varied landscape of grasslands, oak woodlands, vernal pools, riparian areas and wetlands, which support numerous imperiled species, many native plants once common in the Central Valley, and are home to the highest diversity and density of wintering raptors anywhere in North America.

These rangelands, and the species that rely on these habitats, largely persist today due to the positive and experienced grazing and other land stewardship practices of the ranchers that have owned and managed these lands and are committed to a healthy future for their working landscapes. California rangelands are a critical foundation of the economic and social fabric of California's ranching industry and rural communities, and will only continue to provide this important working landscape for California's plants, fish and wildlife if private rangelands remain in ranching.

However, many rangelands are located in California's fastest-growing counties and are at significant risk of conversion to development and other uses. Between 1984 and 2006, over 400,000 acres of rangeland in California were lost to development. Recent State cuts in Williamson Act subvention payments to counties also pose a serious threat to rangelands.

We have identified four preliminary rangeland focal areas and one or more of these areas fall within or near your district. The proposed new voluntary easement program would be focused on these areas. A map on the back of the enclosed fact sheet shows the location of the preliminary focal areas. The fact sheet and the enclosed Q&A provide more information on the proposed CFLA.

San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge Expansion

The proposed expansion presents a unique conservation opportunity to restore a major migratory corridor through the center of California to benefit the birds of the Pacific Flyway and numerous other wildlife species. The Service is studying two segments along the San Joaquin River. The northern portion of the study area includes a reach of the San Joaquin River from the existing boundary of the San Joaquin River Refuge north to a point west of Manteca, where the River divides into three segments: Paradise Cut, Old River, and the San Joaquin River. The southern portion lies between the Refuge and the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge. Expanding the boundary would allow the Service to acquire lands and develop conservation agreements with willing landowners.

The proposed expansion would connect the Refuge with the Grasslands Ecological Area, a 160,000-acre mosaic of Central Valley floor habitats located in the historic floodplain of the San Joaquin River. Maintaining connectivity between the remaining natural areas and minimizing further fragmentation is crucial to the long term viability of California's natural heritage.

Through the proposed boundary expansion, the Service seeks to build on the success of its existing refuges and those of its many partners to conserve and restore fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats along San Joaquin River for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. Enclosed is a fact sheet which provides more information on the proposed expansion.

The Service is just beginning the planning process for these important projects. Both of these projects fall within or near your district. The planning process will include National Environmental Policy Act compliance and have a number of opportunities for public comment. Currently, we are seeking input from the public on the scope of issues to address in the environmental assessment. We will hold a series of public meetings during late May/early June to facilitate this input. Dates, times and locations of these meetings will be announced in a newsletter and press releases to be distributed during the next few weeks.

We will be contacting you shortly to provide additional details and answer any questions you might have. If you have any questions in the meantime, feel free to contact me at (916) 414-6500.

Sincerely,



Mark Pelz
Chief, Refuge Planning
Pacific Southwest Region

Enclosures



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

California Foothills Legacy Area

Protecting California's Rangelands

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is initiating the planning process for the proposed California Foothills Legacy Area (CFLA). CFLA is a proposed new easement program to protect working landscapes developed in cooperation with the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition and is focused on rangelands surrounding California's Central Valley. The planning process will take approximately 18 months to complete.

Several organizations are acquiring easements within the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition boundary. To complement these efforts, the FWS has identified four preliminary focal areas using landscape-level GIS modeling and is considering establishing a new easement program focused on these areas. The focal areas are predicted hotspots of richness and abundance for migratory birds and threatened and endangered species.

Lands within the proposed CFLA are predominantly private working range-

lands that include a rich and varied landscape of grasslands, oak savanna, and oak woodlands. Other important habitats imbedded within this landscape include vernal pools, riparian areas, and wetlands.

Together, these habitats support a breathtaking diversity of wildlife. California's rangeland habitats are some of the least protected in California yet they support an extraordinarily high number of imperiled species. A total of 197 federally-listed threatened and endangered species have documented occurrences within California's grassland, oak savanna, and oak woodland habitats yet they only account for 18 percent of the State's total land area. These three habitats in California alone have more listed species than any other state in the US outside Hawaii.

California's rangelands are also critically important to migratory birds. Oak woodlands in the State may rank among the

top three habitat types in North America for bird richness and California's oak savanna and grasslands support the highest diversity and density of wintering raptors anywhere in North America.

Rangelands represent one of the most threatened habitats throughout the western United States. Intact, privately-owned rangelands face threats from increased low density, rural residential housing development in the foothills and conversion to other uses. Between 1984 and 2006, over 400,000 acres of rangeland in California were lost to development. Within 50 years, it is estimated that rural residential development (densities > 20 acres/unit) within the study area will increase by nearly 1 million acres.

Establishing the CFLA, together with the work of numerous partner agencies and NGOs will make a significant contribution to conserving California's last great landscape – private-owned rangelands.

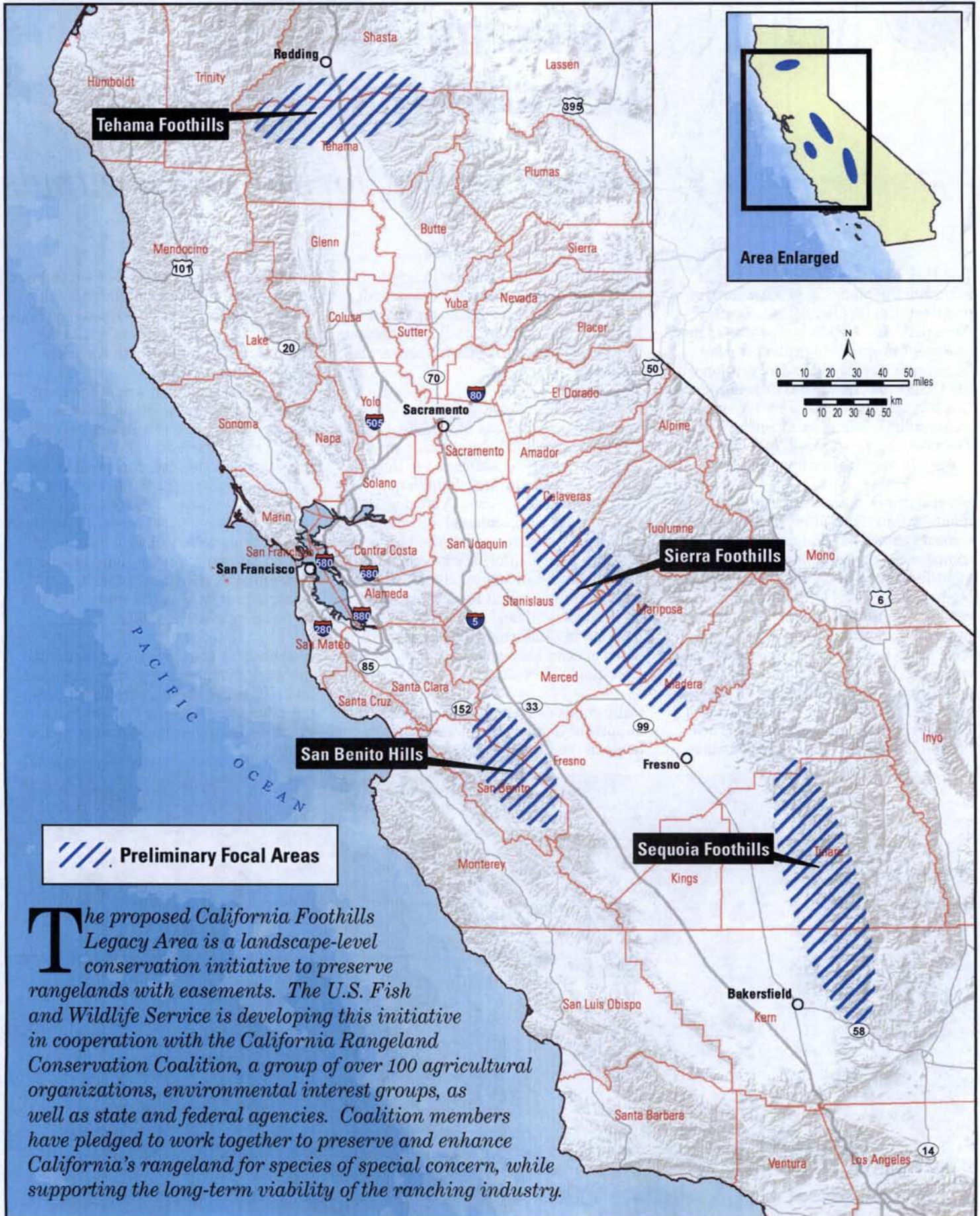
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Proposed California Foothills Legacy Area

Preliminary Focal Areas



The proposed California Foothills Legacy Area is a landscape-level conservation initiative to preserve rangelands with easements. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing this initiative in cooperation with the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition, a group of over 100 agricultural organizations, environmental interest groups, as well as state and federal agencies. Coalition members have pledged to work together to preserve and enhance California's rangeland for species of special concern, while supporting the long-term viability of the ranching industry.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

California Foothills Legacy Area

Questions and Answers

What is the California Foothills Legacy Area?

The California Foothills Legacy Area (CFLA) is a proposed new easement program to protect working landscapes distributed across four focal areas in the foothills surrounding California's Central Valley. This initiative was developed in cooperation with the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition (CRCC), a group of over 100 agricultural organizations, environmental interest groups, as well as state and federal agencies including California Cattlemen's Association, California Farm Bureau Federation, Defenders of Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Game, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Service's Pacific Southwest Region and other coalition members have pledged to work together in the CRCC to preserve and enhance California's rangeland for species of special concern, while

supporting the long-term viability of the ranching industry.

The four focal areas are predicted hotspots of richness and abundance for migratory birds and threatened and endangered species in the Sierra Foothills, Sequoia Foothills, Tehama Foothills and the San Benito Hills. Lands within the proposed CFLA are predominantly private working rangelands that include a rich and varied landscape of grasslands, oak savanna, oak woodlands, vernal pools, riparian areas, and wetlands, which support a breathtaking diversity of wildlife including many imperiled species.

Why Conserve California Rangelands?

California rangelands, including grassland, oak woodland, and oak savanna, are critically important to migratory birds and support numerous threatened and endangered species. Oak woodlands in California rank among the top three habitat types in North America for bird richness and California's oak savanna and grasslands support the highest diversity and density of wintering raptors anywhere in North America.

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California rangelands are among the least protected and most threatened habitats in the State. Intact, privately-owned rangelands face threats from increased low density, rural residential housing development in the foothills and conversion to other uses. Between 1984 and 2006, over 400,000 acres of rangeland in California were lost to development.

Within 50 years, it is estimated that rural residential development (densities > 20 acres/unit) within the study area will increase by nearly 1 million acres.

Loss of California's premier agricultural land protection tool – the Williamson Act – would also threaten critical wildlife habitat, a UC Davis survey of California cattle ranchers has shown. The same study found that 43 percent of the 10 million acres of "non-prime" land protected in the Williamson Act program and used primarily for cattle grazing is also critical for statewide conservation goals. Loss of Williamson Act funding at the state level would put critical habitat at risk for development. Without the tax relief, 42 percent of the surveyed ranchers said they would sell some or all of their rangeland. Fifty-six percent of the ranchers predict their sold land would be developed for non-agricultural uses.

Why is the Proposed CFLA Limited to Easements?

California rangelands, and the numerous species that rely on these habitats, largely persist today due to the grazing and other land stewardship practices of the ranchers that have owned and managed these lands and are committed to a healthy future for their working landscapes. California rangelands are a critical foundation of the economic and social fabric of California's ranching industry and rural communities, and will only continue to provide this important working landscape for California's plants, fish and wildlife if private rangelands remain in ranching.

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and typically prohibit subdivision and commercial development activities but allow for continued agricultural uses such as livestock grazing. Conservation easements not only protect important wildlife habitat but also help maintain the working ranches and agricultural lifestyle of the area.

Under conservation easements, the land ownership and property rights including control of public access would remain with the participating landowner. In addition, participating properties remain on local tax rolls.

Given Current Budget Constraints, How Can the Service Afford to Establish New Refuges?

The planning process now underway will determine if new refuge acquisition boundaries should be established. If a refuge is established, easements would be acquired only from willing sellers and when funding becomes available.

We anticipate that funds for easement acquisition within the CFLA would come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which is appropriated by Congress.

Though LWCF funding for acquisition varies from year to year and may not be available at all during some years, it is important to view land acquisition as a long term project. For many refuges, acquisition occurs over many years or even decades. The Service's Pacific Southwest Region has also been successful at leveraging other sources of funding for land acquisition (state, NGOs, etc).

How Can the Public Get Involved in the Planning Process?

The planning process for the CFLA will include National Environmental Policy Act compliance and will have a number of opportunities for public comment. Currently, we are seeking input from the public on the number, location, and

size of the focal areas and the scope of issues to address in the environmental assessment. We will hold a series of public meetings during late May/early June to facilitate this input. Dates, times and locations of these meetings will be announced in a newsletter and press releases to be distributed during the next few weeks.



April 2011





U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge

Protecting and Restoring the San Joaquin River Riparian Corridor

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is initiating the planning process for the proposed expansion of the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge. The proposed expansion presents a unique conservation opportunity to restore a major migratory corridor through the center of California to benefit the birds of the Pacific Flyway and numerous other wildlife. The planning process will take approximately 18 months to complete.

The Service is studying two segments along the San Joaquin River. The northern portion of the study area includes a reach of the San Joaquin River from the existing boundary of the San Joaquin River Refuge north to a point west of Manteca, where the River divides into three segments: Paradise Cut, Old River, and the San Joaquin River. The southern portion lies between the Refuge and the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge. Expanding the boundary would allow the Service to acquire lands and develop

conservation agreements with willing landowners.

The proposed expansion would connect the Refuge with the Grasslands Ecological Area, a 160,000-acre mosaic of Central Valley floor habitats located in the historic floodplain of the San Joaquin River. This vast network of freshwater marshes, alkali grassland and riparian thickets is the result of decades of collaborative conservation involving private duck clubs, CA State Parks, CA Department of Fish and Game, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Maintaining connectivity between the remaining natural areas and minimizing further fragmentation is crucial to the long term viability of California's natural heritage.

Although currently degraded, the San Joaquin River basin once supported a highly diverse ecosystem. The valley floor was composed of a complex matrix

of channels, swales, ridges, flood basins, and sloughs that were periodically inundated and supported a great diversity of permanent and seasonal wetlands, riparian scrub and forest, and aquatic habitat teeming with fish and wildlife. These seasonal and permanent freshwater marsh and wetlands were, and continue to be, important habitat for migratory birds of the Pacific Flyway. Tens of millions of migratory waterfowl darkened the skies each winter. Nearly 50,000 acres of riparian forest rich with neotropical migratory birds and unique small mammal species flanked the streams and rivers in the basin. Historically, the San Joaquin River's Chinook salmon runs accounted for up to 40 percent (over 300,000) of the San Joaquin Valley's total Chinook salmon.

Historic impacts, such as gravel mining, construction of dams and diversions, and habitat clearing, dewatered the river and destroyed the surrounding wetlands that used to span a wide swath of the valley floor. Current threats, especially habitat destruction and insufficient water supply, continue to degrade the river and can derail efforts to bring the river back to life. Today, the San Joaquin River is one of the most highly-altered systems in the state. For decades, the diversion of water from the San Joaquin has caused at least 20 miles of the River to be dry for much of the year and nearly all of the riparian vegetation has been cleared. Less than 10 percent of historic riparian habitat exists and wetland habitats have shrunk to roughly five percent of their former extent. This loss of habitat has had substantial effects on migratory and resident bird populations.

Through the proposed boundary expansion, the Service seeks to build on the success of its existing refuges and those of its many partners to conserve and restore fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats along San Joaquin River for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.



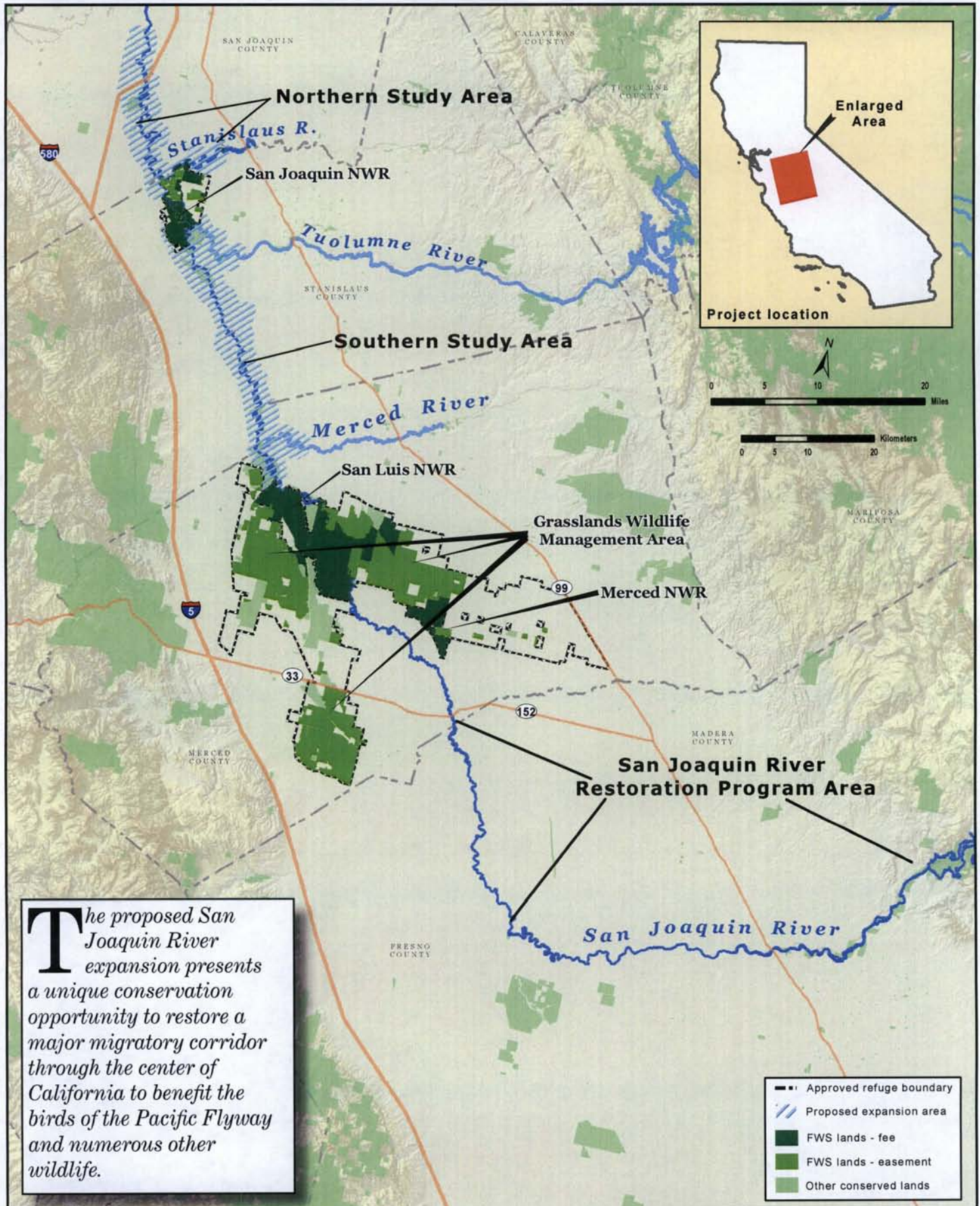


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge

San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Fresno and Madera Counties, CA

Proposed Expansion



The proposed San Joaquin River expansion presents a unique conservation opportunity to restore a major migratory corridor through the center of California to benefit the birds of the Pacific Flyway and numerous other wildlife.