

# Conservation objectives for waterbirds in California's Central Valley

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Despite a loss of over 90% of its historical wetlands, California's Central Valley remains of continental importance to nongame waterbirds.

To guide its bird conservation efforts, the Central Valley Joint Venture's (CVJV) periodically updated implementation plan sets conservation objectives to stimulate their attainment and track progress.

Lacking robust data on the population sizes and trends of most of the region's waterbird species, we set CVJV conservation objectives for this group by selecting 10 focal species. These species are of heightened conservation concern or otherwise represent the habitat needs of Central Valley waterbirds.

Given extensive historical habitat loss, we assumed focal species populations have declined by  $\geq 50\%$ . We defined population objectives for seven focal species as increasing their current populations by 10% over 10 years and doubling them in 100 years.

For two species with very small breeding populations and limited breeding habitat, objectives are to increase their current population size by 20% every 10 years to triple it in the next 100 years. For one species with a large and increasing breeding population, the objective is to maintain its current population.

The corresponding habitat objectives are to increase wetlands or enhance suitable crops for waterbirds in proportion to the population objectives.

These include an increase over 10 years of 19,641 acres of winter seasonal wetlands, 2,276 acres each of semipermanent and summer seasonal wetlands, and 1,416 acres of strategically placed riparian forest. Agricultural needs include additional winter flooding of 37,461 acres of rice and 5,281 acres of corn.

We distributed the habitat objectives across five planning regions, sometimes favoring proportionally larger increases

where most needed. Because species' habitat requirements may vary geographically, we developed region-specific conservation recommendations for each focal species.

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## Main Points

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To foster recovery of waterbird populations depleted by habitat loss, it is important to set time-bound, quantitative conservation objectives.

We defined objectives to increase current populations by 10–20% over the next 10 years, and corresponding habitat objectives to increase wetlands or enhance suitable crops in proportion to the population objectives.

To maximize success, however, conservationists must take into account the specific needs of individual waterbird species, as a one-size-fits-all approach will not support the highest diversity of waterbirds.

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