



TULARE BASIN WILDLIFE PARTNERS
Creating Opportunities for Nature and People

Tulare Basin Conservation Report Summary: Goose Lake

Introduction

With a 3,000-year history of human use on the land, the Goose Lake area provides fertile farmland, important wetlands, wildlife travel corridors, recreational opportunities and places to inspire the soul. Though much of this region in northcentral Kern County has been altered by human uses, this area still features a diverse landscape with excellent representations of most historic native lands, worthy of immediate conservation action.

The Goose Lake Conservation Report proposes an impressive program of conservation and restoration for important natural areas in the Tulare Lake Basin. This report recommends innovative solutions to current land and water challenges by protecting existing natural areas and wildlife corridors while restoring other areas that no longer provide economic benefit from agriculture or resource extraction. In addition, the report significantly improves the status of many wildlife species by protecting the places and travel corridors they need to survive.

The Goose Lake Conservation Report recommends the following:

- Protect 60,000 acres of existing uplands, such as shrubland and grassland;
- Protect 10,000 acres of existing wetlands, such as marshes, floodplains, creeks and ponds;
- Restore 70,000 acres of uplands;
- Restore 25,000 acres of wetlands;
- Complete Semitropic Ecological Reserve;
- Complete Buttonwillow Ecological Reserve; and
- Support the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Kern National Wildlife Refuge easement program.

Goose Lake, the only ephemeral lake left in the Tulare Basin, hosts a wide diversity of plants and animals supported by its intact creek systems. With an eye toward balancing wildlife-friendly agriculture with targeted conservation projects, the Tulare Basin Wildlife Partners seeks to protect this important jewel in the southern San Joaquin Valley for current and future generations.

Goose Lake Facts

Location: Northcentral Kern County, California, west of Delano, Wasco and Shafter, east of Lost Hills and north of Buttonwillow

Size: 174, 842 acres

Ownership: 67% private; 33% public

Natural Lands: 23 types: 39% grasses and forbs, 35% shrubs, 22% trees, 4% vernal pools

Land Use: 56% native land; 23% sporadically farmed; 19.5% intensively farmed; 1% evaporation ponds; 0.5% ditches, canals & developed

Goals

The Goose Lake Conservation Report goals include:

1. Conserve existing uplands, such as grassland and shrub-land, and travel corridors between these areas for unique wildlife species.
2. Restore wildlife corridors that have been lost between existing patches of grassland and shrubland.
3. Protect and restore floodplains, marshes and open water for wintering and migratory waterfowl.
4. Provide breeding season wetlands for waterfowl, shorebirds, colonial water birds and other wildlife, including Buena Vista Lake shrew (*Sorex ornatus relictus*), southwestern pond turtle (*Emmys marmorata pallida*), fulvous whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*), least bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) and giant garter snake (*Thamnophis gigas*).
5. Restore saltbush scrub, alkali sink, valley grassland, wetland and areas along creeks and streams.
6. Provide flood control benefits for cities, farms and natural areas by protecting or creating wetlands to store flood water.
7. Recreate integrated historical southern San Joaquin Valley landscapes.

Objectives

Objectives for the Goose Lake Conservation Report include:

1. Develop a conservation strategy for Goose Lake Bottom and the northern portion of Jerry Slough, which features outstanding biodiversity.
2. Protect remaining native natural areas for wildlife.
3. Restore unproductive farmland to natural land for grazing and use by wildlife; manage under voluntary conservation agreements.
4. Conserve remaining private wetlands and establish additional private wetlands in the vicinity of Goose Lake.
5. Establish voluntary farming agreements that maintain wildlife-friendly farming in places that serve as foraging grounds for waterfowl, sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*) and other wildlife.
6. Maintain and restore landscape features.

Site-Specific Recommendations

For ease of planning and discussion the Goose Lake planning area was divided into 16 sub-management areas, each with different status, goals and management recommendations. The majority of native and farmed land in the planning area will remain in private ownership for grazing and wildlife-friendly farming under voluntary conservation agreements. Some lands will be purchased by agencies and conservation organizations, while others will be used for duck clubs, recreation, hunting, photography or education.

Buttonwillow Ecological Reserve

Status: 10,000 acres, 13.5% protected; 60% intensively farmed, 40% native land with the best reproducing populations of sensitive and unique wildlife species in the area.

Goals: Protect native natural areas and restore altered land to native grassland in low areas or to shrubland in upland areas.

East Side Wildlife Corridor

Status: 4,200 acres, 0% protected; 20% sporadically farmed, 40% intensively farmed, 40% native uplands. Area connects Buttonwillow Ecological Reserve to west slope of Semitropic Ridge.

Goals: Protect natural areas in Ecological Reserves through Metro-Bakersfield and Valley Floor HCP processes. Restore altered land to native grassland in low areas or to shrubland in upland areas.

West Buttonwillow Ridge

Status: 8,000 acres, 0% protected; 40% sporadically farmed, 30% intensively farmed, 30% scattered native upland.

Goals: Protect remaining native land through Metro-Bakersfield HCP purchases; restore altered lands.

Westside Wildlife Corridor

Status: 4,500 acres, 0% protected; 20% sporadically farmed, 80% native land.

Goals: Protect natural areas through Metro-Bakersfield and Valley Floor HCP purchases. Create and maintain wildlife corridor; restore altered lands.

Goose Lake Wildlife Area

Status: 10,200 acres, 0% protected; 20% sporadically farmed, 70% intensively farmed, 10% native uplands; extensive areas with hydric soils.

Goals: Upland and wetland areas could remain in private ownership with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) voluntary conservation agreements.

Management Recommendations: Flood wetland hydric soils to provide high-quality areas for waterbirds; manage summer water to benefit wildlife. Provide wildlife viewing opportunities and re-introduce wetland-dependent species such as giant garter snake. Develop a comprehensive management plan.

Goose Lake – Jerry Slough

Status: 5,800 acres, 0% protected; 5% farmed, 95% native land, with extremely high biodiversity and extensive existing stands of native perennial grasses.

Goals: Protect wetlands through voluntary conservation agreements or fee title purchase; partner with local landowners to maintain biodiversity.

Management Recommendations: Flood slough channels and adjacent flood plain to maintain native plant species and to provide water for duck clubs. Document all plant and animal species and conduct breeding and migratory surveys. Maintain and improve status of all native species through revegetation and reintroduction.

East Buttonwillow Ridge

Status: 4,800 acres, 0% protected; 30% sporadically farmed, 20% intensively farmed, 50% native uplands.

Goals: Protect existing natural areas in ecological reserves through Metro-Bakersfield HCP purchases; protect upland portions through NRCS Wetlands Reserve Program; restore degraded lands.

Goose Lake Wetlands Reserve Program

Status: 10,500 acres, 48% protected; 52% intensively farmed, 30% wetland, 18% upland.

Goals: Continue NRCS voluntary conservation agreement program with willing landowners; purchase residual value of water; manage cooperatively with duck clubs and refuges.

Management Recommendations: Consult with landowner to purchase residual property value and cooperatively manage for public benefit and wildlife; revegetate with native species. Ensure adequate water supply by partnering with water storage districts and through cooperative agreements for flood control, water quality, wildlife viewing and native biodiversity.

Kern River Channel

Status: 6,500 acres, 0% protected; 0% farmed, 100% natural area and river with degraded native condition due to channelization and presence of non-native plants confined to channel in the south; meandering channel and higher quality natural areas prevail farther north.

Goals: Purchase natural areas along the river in fee title or cooperatively manage. Restore moderate flows and utilize channel for flood control and excess drain water. Fund through foundation grants and Wildlife Conservation Board restoration program.

Management Recommendations: Restore and maintain minimum summer flows at 50 cubic feet per second for as long as possible. Revegetate with native plants adapted to waterways. Restore high-magnitude flood events on a ten-year cycle to maintain trees and shrubs.

Semitropic Ecological Reserve Area

Status: 26,300 acres, 30% protected; 10% intensively farmed, 90% high-quality native uplands with second best native species populations in planning area.

Goals: Expand ecological reserves through Metro-Bakersfield and Valley Floor HCP and USFWS Section 6 purchases to protect native land and wildlife corridors.

I-5 Wildlife Corridor

Status: 14,700 acres, 0% protected; 15% intensively farmed, 40% sporadically farmed, 45% native land.

Goals: In the south, expand Semitropic Ecological Reserve; establish and restore one-mile-wide wildlife corridor through fee title purchase. Some areas could be used for wildlife-friendly farming. This drainage-impacted region is suitable for a voluntary land retirement program.

Management Recommendations: Partner with landowners to purchase voluntary conservation agreements and manage for maximum wildlife benefit through wildlife-friendly farming practices.

West of Kern National Wildlife Refuge

Status: 7,200 acres, 3% protected; 87% sporadically farmed, 8% evaporation ponds, 5% native uplands.

Goals: Protect existing native areas; establish a one-mile-wide by three-mile-long wildlife corridor along the northern edge. Establish voluntary conservation agreements through NRCS or USFWS and promote wildlife-friendly farming.

Management Recommendations: Partner with landowners to manage for maximum wildlife benefit.

Kern National Wildlife Refuge

Status: 10,900 acres, 100% protected; 65% native wetland, 35% native upland.

Goals: Continue current management by USFWS.

Management Recommendations: Implement comprehensive conservation plan; enhance plant diversity and control saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.).

Garces Highway Wildlife Corridor

Status: 30,000 acres, 0% protected; 10% intensively farmed, 90% native land.

Goals: Protect wetland-dependent wildlife through USFWS voluntary conservation agreements.

Management Recommendations: Purchase voluntary conservation agreements to protect wetlands.

Duck Club Core

Status: 4,200 acres, 0% protected; 40% irrigated pasture and farmed; 50% wetland, 10% native upland.

Goals: Conserve wetlands through USFWS voluntary conservation agreements and feature wildlife-friendly agriculture on conserved farmland properties.

Management Recommendations: Protect remaining native natural areas; secure long-term affordable water supply for duck clubs.

Eastside Farming & Wildlife Corridor

Status: 6,400 acres, 0% protected; 40% sporadically farmed, 20% intensively farmed, 40% native land.

Goals: Protect natural areas through Metro-Bakersfield and Valley Floor HCP purchases. Maintain eastside corridor for wildlife, north to south; purchase voluntary conservation agreements and feature wildlife-friendly farming on conserved properties.

Acknowledgements

The Goose Lake Conservation Report was produced in collaboration with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Tulare Lake Basin Working Group participants.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service generously funded production of this conservation plan summary with a grant from the Central Valley Project Improvement Act Habitat Restoration Program. The Natural Resources Conservation Service and San Joaquin Valley Partnership provided additional funding.