

# Action Critical to Preserve Pacific Flyway in Drought

Water to Central Valley refuge areas is critical to protecting basic ecosystem values along the Pacific Flyway, especially during drought. The historical habitat for these birds is virtually gone, and a complex of remnant wetlands and wildlife-compatible crops is all that remains to support millions of migratory birds each year.

California's drought threatens to decimate long-term public investments in Pacific Flyway recovery. The drying-up of agricultural habitat places overwhelming pressure on our public and private refuges to provide food resources and nesting habitat for millions of birds and other species. Yet Central Valley refuges will likely receive less than one-quarter of their legally-mandated water supplies this year. As a result significant numbers of birds may face death due to disease or malnourishment, and impacts will be felt for years to come with reduced breeding success.

Unquestionably, our farms and communities are suffering during this drought. So, too, are migratory birds, resident waterfowl, and other wetland wildlife. These species have no insurance policy to recover from the significant loss of habitat they could suffer this year. Action must be taken to safeguard basic habitat for waterfowl and migratory birds, and protect our public trust investments and international commitments along the Pacific Flyway.

### Actions needed

- Prioritize water supplies to public and private wetlands. Legal commitments to refuge water contracts should not be compromised, especially in drought years. This is exactly the moment when larger ecological values in the flyway are most at risk.
- Build environmental benefits into drought management activities.
- Enhance fallowed farmland for birds and wildlife through landowner incentives to provide habitat. For example, cover crops can provide critically important waterfowl nesting habitat with minimal precipitation and little to no irrigation.



**A group of ducks lifts off over the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge in California's Central Valley.**

- Provide additional funding to refuges and easement lands for equipment and operations so that existing water supplies can be maximized.
- Assure water will be conserved in the system for delivery to wetlands in fall, when needed most by refuges for millions of arriving birds.
- Fund short-term monitoring of drought-related bird impacts so wetland managers can respond to changing conditions on the ground and minimize disease outbreaks from overcrowding and inadequate freshwater flow.
- Fund long-term monitoring programs to gauge population impacts and responses so better systemic drought response policy can be developed.

The mission of the Central Valley Joint Venture is to work collaboratively through diverse partnerships to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands and associated habitats for waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds, and riparian songbirds, in accordance with conservation actions identified in its 2006 Implementation Plan.

