



California Drought Statement (November 2022)

California's continued drought crisis is likely to have far reaching consequences for the environment as millions of migratory waterbirds traveling the Pacific Flyway begin to descend on the Sacramento Valley.

“Drought has dried up what was once a reliable source of wildlife habitat here in the Sacramento Valley. The lack of water now threatens 7-10 million wetland dependent birds and has the potential to impact the entire 4,000 mile long Pacific Flyway,” said President & CEO of the California Rice Commission Tim Johnson.

The 2022 estimated rice harvest is likely to be about half of a typical season, with the lack of water in the Lake Shasta watershed resulting in roughly 250,000 acres planted for the season. This translates to a significant loss for the 230 wildlife species that rely on rice fields for food, a place to rest and raise their young. During the fall and winter, rice fields are a major food source for migrating ducks and geese, providing 60% of their diet during those months.

“While the long-term damage drought has caused to wildlife is unknown, the CRC and rice farmers have been working together with State and Federal Agencies as well as conservation organizations to not only provide as much vital habitat as possible this year, but to also assist in tracking the impacts this historic drought will have on waterbirds, with the goal of using that science to better help the Pacific Flyway in the years ahead,” said Johnson.

For months now the California Rice Commission, Sacramento Valley rice farmers, wildlife biologists and conservation groups including; Audubon California, California Waterfowl Association, Point Blue Conservation Science, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, California Trout, Northern California Water Association, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Department of Fish and Wildlife, United States Geological Survey, and the Department of Water Resources have been working together with the CRC to develop and implement several wildlife conservation programs to be carried out in rice fields, aimed at maximizing essential habitat in the Sacramento Valley for waterfowl traveling the Pacific Flyway.