

The Cosumnes River Project and Preserve



The Cosumnes River Watershed Project

The Cosumnes River is the last undammed river flowing from the Sierra Nevada mountains into California's Great Central Valley.

Originating at an elevation of 7,600 feet, the headwaters of the Cosumnes River flow through the El Dorado National Forest and support native trout fisheries and many other aquatic species. Descending towards the Central Valley, the river passes through blue oak, grassland, and vernal pool communities. The lower reaches of the river provide critical salmon spawning habitat and the broad floodplain of the lower river harbors valley oak riparian forest and freshwater wetlands used by thousands of resident and migratory birds.

The Nature Conservancy, in partnership with local landowners, businesses, other private partners, federal, state and local government agencies, is pursuing conservation strategies that safeguard critical ecological processes within the 1,200 square-mile Cosumnes watershed and that maintain the biological and hydrological health of this important natural system.

From 1987 to 1999, land acquisitions focused on the

lower floodplain. In 1999, The Nature Conservancy purchased a 12,300-acre cattle ranch featuring blue oak woodlands and vernal pool grasslands, protecting a large portion of the upper watershed and high-quality habitats. Downstream, Staten Island is a 9,200-acre Delta farm managed for wintering waterfowl and owned by The Nature Conservancy.

The Cosumnes River Preserve

SIZE: 46,000 acres

LOCATION: Southern Sacramento and northern San Joaquin Counties, on the eastern edge of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Nearest towns are Walnut Grove and Galt.

HISTORY: Miwok Indians once lived in the area, attracted by the rich hunting and fishing grounds and the abundant acorns that formed the staple of their diet. Nineteenth century settlers cleared much of the rich bottomland for farming and cattle grazing. Agriculture remains the predominant land use on and around the Preserve.

GEOGRAPHY: Although nearly 100 miles from the Golden Gate, the lower reaches of the Cosumnes River are affected by ocean tides funneling into the Delta

through the Carquinez Straits, pushing fresh water back up the Cosumnes. The climate is Mediterranean, with hot, dry summers and cool, moist winters. Tule fogs are common in mid-winter. The average land elevation at the Preserve is less than ten feet. Because there are no major dams on the Cosumnes, frequent flooding occurs in response to heavy winter rains. The load of rich silt and sand carried by floodwater introduces valuable nutrients to adjacent forests, wetlands, and grasslands. Because of its historic stands of valley oak forests, portions of the Preserve have been selected as a National Natural Landmark.

FLORA: The Cosumnes River Preserve protects two plant communities now rare, riparian (streamside) forest and freshwater marsh; less than 4% of each community remains intact in the state. Valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), and Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*) form the forest's tall, continuous canopy. Great vines of wild grape (*Vitis californica*) festoon the trees, giving the forest an appearance that John Muir described as "tropical luxuriance." This lush forest growth results from the abundance of available water during the optimum growing temperatures of summer. Freshwater marshes bordering

the forest support vigorous growth of tules (*Scirpus*) and cattails (*Typha latifolia*). Annual grasslands and cultivated fields occur in drier parts of the Preserve.

FAUNA: The river supports runs of Chinook salmon and steelhead. Resident mammals include river otter, beaver and muskrat. The rare giant garter snake makes its home in marshes and uplands. The riparian forest bordering the river is home to raccoon, black-tailed mule deer, mink, and many species of songbirds. Over 200 species of birds have been recorded on the Preserve, including several nesting pairs of threatened Swainson's hawk. Marshes support greater and lesser sandhill cranes, Ross' white-fronted and Canada geese, tundra swans, and many species of ducks. Resident birds such as great blue herons, black-crowned night herons and white-tailed kites are common.

MANAGEMENT: Lands within the Cosumnes River Preserve are jointly owned by The Nature Conservancy, The Bureau of Land Management, Ducks Unlimited, the California Department of Fish and Game, State Lands Commission, the California Department of Water Resources, Sacramento County and various private owners. While each partner contributes to the design and maintenance of the Preserve, it is managed out of one on-site office.

The Nature Conservancy is reestablishing riparian forest and perennial grasslands through active and passive restoration efforts. Valley oak, Oregon ash, Fremont's cottonwood, box elder, willow, wild rose, and elderberry are planted to create the diverse understory of trees and shrubs found in mature riparian forest. Grasslands are managed for greater abundance and diversity of native species using the tools of fire and grazing.

Ducks Unlimited and the Bureau of Land Management are working together to create and enhance seasonal and perennial waterfowl ponds. Wetlands are managed for diverse aquatic plant communities that provide nesting and brood-rearing habitats for waterfowl during spring and summer. Fall and winter flooding provides resting and feeding areas for both visiting migrants and winter resident birds. Viewing opportunities are excellent from Desmond and Bruceville Roads.

VISITOR RULES: Please remember:

1. Hunting, fishing, biking, and collecting are prohibited.
2. No fires, camping, or smoking.
3. Pets and firearms are prohibited.
4. Pack out your trash.
5. Mosquito repellent, drinking water, and sun protection are advised during your visit.

ACCESS: Take Interstate 5 to the Twin Cities Road exit, about midway between Stockton and Sacramento. Take Twin Cities Road east to Franklin Boulevard. Turn south on Franklin Boulevard.

The **Visitor Center** is located about 2 miles down Franklin Boulevard on the left. It is staffed by volunteer naturalists every weekend from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and is usually open during the week – hours vary.

The Visitor Center houses interpretive exhibits describing the natural and cultural history of the region as well as the restoration and management of the Preserve.

From the Visitor Center, take the **Cosumnes River Walk**, a 3-mile dirt nature trail, or the **Lost Slough Wetlands Walk**, a 1-mile paved, universally accessible trail. Both trails are open sunrise to sunset, year-round.

Paddling? Launch your canoe or kayak from the parking lot just south of the Visitor Center.

All other parts of the Preserve are reserved for the wildlife.

The Preserve address and information line are:
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