

CALIFORNIA WATERFOWL

2022

ANNUAL REPORT



CALIFORNIA
WATERFOWL



2021-22 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

17,647 ACRES

Wetland, riparian, breeding-habitat and altered agricultural practice work completed in California in 2021. Of that, 9,229 acres were public land, and 1,768 acres were wheat and other grain fields where harvest was delayed to allow duck nests to hatch. Total value of work was \$4.5 million, funded with public grants, private matching dollars and CWA funds. (See more on pages 28 and 31.)

8,952 DUCKS AND GEESE

Banded by CWA biologists and partners in 2021.

27,073 WOOD DUCKS

Hatched from nest boxes in the California Wood Duck Program in 2020, for a total of 937,968 since the program's inception in 1991.

1,523 STUDENTS

Learned about waterfowl and wetlands, and the role hunters play in conserving both. Slightly over half of our presentations were conducted in person, as pandemic restrictions eased.

2,345 HUNTERS

Enjoyed private-land hunts through CWA's Hunt Program. Over 400 of these participants were active-duty service members or military veterans who enjoyed their excursions at no cost, thanks to generous donors.

1,276

CWA supporters who have risen to the level of Major Donor. (See more on page 33.)

50

The number of in-person banquets and other fundraising events held by CWA in the second half

of 2021 – and we were so glad to be back! These and online events netted \$1.8 million to support CWA's mission and vision. (See more on page 30.)

\$2 MILLION

The amount of money that can begin flowing into increasing nesting habitat for ducks and pheasants starting next year, thanks to passage of CWA-sponsored AB 614 last year. (See more on page 29.)

4,563

The number of messages sent to legislators last year by CWA supporters about various bills we supported or opposed.

Looking for more facts and figures about CWA's work? Go to calwaterfowl.org/annual-report and check out our 2021-22 Fact Sheet.

WHAT WE DO

WATERFOWL

- Band waterfowl for research
- Rescue imperiled wild duck nests
- Help give duck nests in California farm fields more time to hatch
- Provide nest boxes for wood ducks
- Engage volunteers in hands-on work

WETLANDS

- Restore and renew wintering habitat
- Add breeding habitat
- Manage CWA-owned wetlands
- Assist duck clubs with grant-writing

HUNTING

- Private-land hunts for the public
- Hunts on CWA properties
- Veteran hunting & fishing trips

EDUCATION

- Teach conservation in public schools
- Lead school field trips to wetlands
- Junior Duck Stamp Program

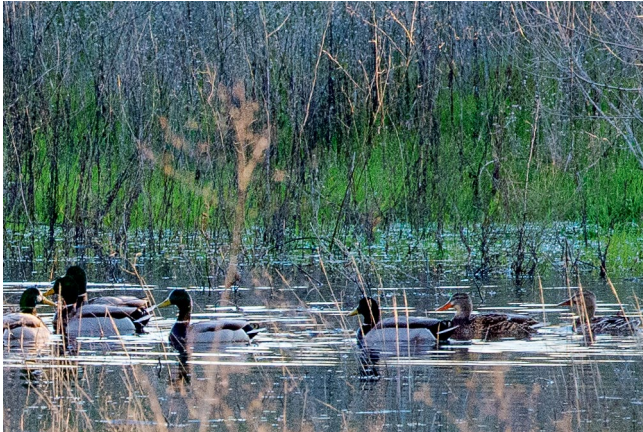
ADVOCACY

- Defend hunting and hunters' gun rights
- Call for optimal hunting regulations
- Fight for water for managed wetlands
- Sponsor conservation-friendly bills



A WETLAND COMES TO LIFE in Woodland city limits

Most of California Waterfowl’s habitat work takes place on public and private managed wetlands where hunting is allowed for at least part of the year, but this recently completed project in Woodland bucks that trend.



The restoration contains a little honey hole for mallards, flooded timber for wood ducks, big water for Canada geese and shallow water for shorebirds, but there’s not a single hunting blind in sight. That’s because it’s located inside Woodland city limits at the 160-acre Woodland Regional Park Preserve.



This wetland, located in sight of modern subdivisions, is designed to be a resource for waterfowl and other wetland-dependent animals, and also for school children and the thousands of families that live just a short drive away.



Photos: Holly A. Heyser

CWA Assistant Project Manager Rich Cain plants sedges that will fight erosion where water flows from a well into the wetland.

CWA Education Coordinator Molly Maupin said wetlands like these are critical for making outdoor field trips accessible to schools. “Providing schools with a site that is free, local and easy to get to will help many schools in the area provide students with experiences that they would not receive otherwise,” she said.

The park, set to open in 2022, will ultimately also include a science center, learning labs, classrooms, lecture halls and a banquet room.

CWA’s work here was made possible with a \$486,000 grant from the state Wildlife Conservation Board and \$40,000 from the Joseph and Vera Long Foundation, and it was part of a cooperative effort with the city of Woodland, Tuleyome and the Explorit Science Center. 🦋

PROGRESS IS AT HAND For our mallard population

It's no secret that California's mallard population has been declining, with the state's mallard harvest following the same trend. And it's no mystery why: BREEDING HABITAT.

Mallards and the other ducks that breed here in noteworthy numbers – gadwall and cinnamon teal – need two basic things for breeding success: water and nesting habitat. The former is largely in Mother Nature's hands from year to year. The latter is largely up to humans.

Despite the fact that human land use has encroached mightily on wildlife habitat, the potential for nesting habitat is all around us. Ducks nest in winter wheat and other small-grain fields, in cover crops such as vetch and wild oats, in fallow fields where vegetation is allowed to grow, and in natural habitat that provides adequate cover. They just need to be near water where they can take their ducklings after they hatch.

In 2022, California hunters will begin generating about \$2 million a year to fund nesting habitat in this state thanks to passage

of a California Waterfowl-sponsored bill, AB 614 by Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, D-Winters. The new law adds \$10 surcharges to the state's duck and upland game bird validations to pay for incentives to provide nesting cover on both public and private land. It can even help fund CWA's popular Delayed Wheat Harvest Incentive Program (calwaterfowl.org/wheat).

As originally proposed, the bill would have added \$5 surcharges – which three-fourths of our members said they would support in a 2019 survey – but the Legislature increased it to \$10. While it's a bigger surcharge than we proposed, it is also a bigger war chest to fight the decline of an important species to the state's waterfowlers.

We wish there were more affordable ways to boost mallard population, as CWA's Wood Duck Program has done for that cavity-nesting species by deploying an army of volunteers to install, maintain and monitor wood duck nest boxes. Unfortunately, experience tells us



A duck nest in a cover crop field in the Sacramento Valley.



A hen flushes from her nest in a cover crop field in the Sacramento Valley while a CWA biologist marks the spot where she flushed.

that mallards don't flock to condo complexes of nest structures the way wood ducks do; they need ground cover, and anywhere from 0.2 to 3 acres of it per nesting hen. The good news is that providing nest cover is passive, not labor intensive – letting the habitat do its job – so it's the most bang for the buck you can get. Ducks get what they need, without humans intruding in their space. 🦆

For more information about how this program will work, please go to calwaterfowl.org/news/new-fee-new-hope.

WHAT ABOUT KLAMATH?

Another key brake on California's mallard population is the almost complete elimination of water deliveries to the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge, which provides critical nesting and brood-rearing habitat when it has water.

CWA is continuing with its multi-year purchase of a 3,750-acre-foot-per-year water right for the refuge, initiated in early 2021 with the generous support of our donors. The successful delivery of water from that right in 2021 was a key proof-of-concept that opened the door to additional water-right acquisitions.

But as of this writing, the refuge is not anticipating any other water deliveries in 2022 due to drought and water diversions for endangered species. Despite whatever we will be able to provide, the situation for waterfowl in the Klamath Basin is expected to remain dire in 2022 – even Tule Lake NWR, which normally has good water supplies, may go completely dry.



BLACKHAWK: A case study in impact

Fundraising banquets are a cornerstone of California Waterfowl, vehicles for both fundraising to support the organization’s work, and social connections to support the Golden State’s community of duck hunters – something we all came to appreciate after the Covid pandemic took so much away from us.

Among the 100 or so events CWA does in a normal year, one stands out for its dazzling combination of passion, mission, high impact and, now, evolution: Blackhawk.

Chaired since 2010 by Mark Bittner, Blackhawk was for years a gala held at the Blackhawk Museum in Contra Costa County, where participants could admire the museum’s glittering classic-car collection as they sipped fine wines and perused the evening’s tantalizing auction offerings.

When Covid temporarily shut down the museum – and all of CWA’s banquets – the Blackhawk committee refused to give in. Instead, they decided to take the gala outdoors to one of the oldest operating gun clubs in the United States: the Martinez Gun Club.

The car collection was traded for a trap shoot, participants’ fine clothing for jeans and shooting vests, but the cut-above program remained intact. There was still a strong focus on veterans, advocacy and hunting rights; a host of vendors offering trade-show style specials; honors for CWA’s luminary donors; and a “paddle-raise” that can net upwards of \$200,000 in donations.

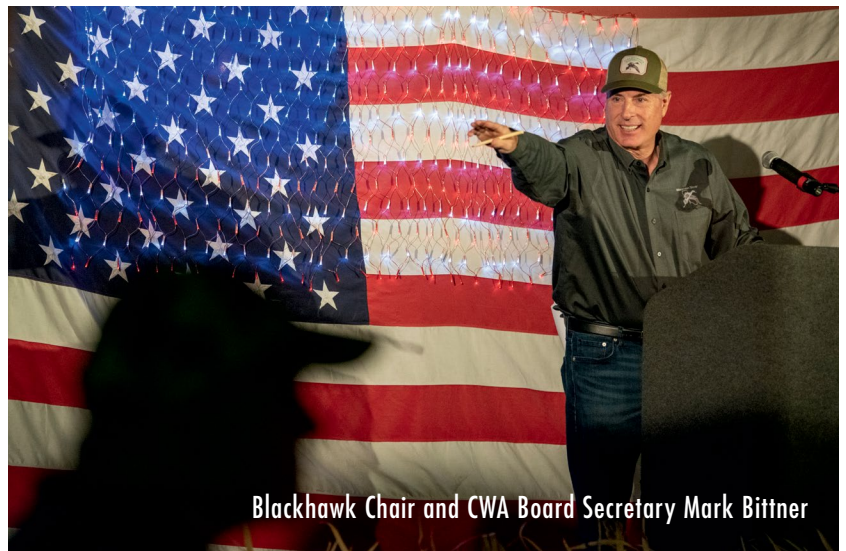
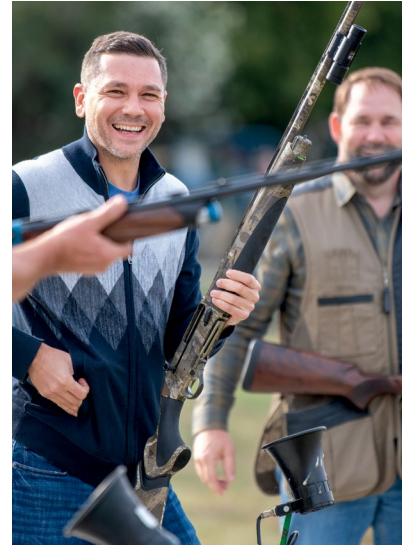
“Boy, it was a home run,” said Bittner, who is also secretary of CWA’s board. The event smashed previous fundraising records, and participants loved it. “And now we’ve permanently moved to the Martinez Gun Club.”

Bittner will be the first to tell you that this event would be nothing without its “Dream Team” committee of 12 organizers, who spend literally half the year in preparations. They stay motivated by the quality of work CWA does in this state.

“It’s such a good organization,” he said. “It’s worth every bit of time we put in.” 🦅



Albert Seeno, center, receiving the K.H. Hofmann Lifetime Achievement Award. His brother, Tom Seeno, was also honored, but not able to attend.



Blackhawk Chair and CWA Board Secretary Mark Bittner



Photos: Holly A. Heyser

Bare-knuckle boxer and former mixed martial artist Chad Mendes



Major League Baseball Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson

BADGER ALMOND: A critical piece of a complicated puzzle

Photos: Brian Clasby

It is a familiar irony in California that a piece of land that was once literally part of a lake now struggles to get water. So it was with great joy that in 2021, CWA was finally able to provide wetland habitat and hunting at the Badger Almond unit of its Goose Lake property in Kern County.

California Waterfowl acquired Goose Lake – property named for a lake that was drained long ago – in 2013, and fairly quickly began flooding and hunting its Houchin Unit, near Lost Hills. Houchin, which is at the outer edges of the former lake bed, has both well water and rights to surface water.

But Badger Almond has been a tougher nut to crack. Once solidly in the lake bed, it has rights to surface water from two water districts, but it can only get surface water in the summer due to logistics and water district rules. So for winter flood-up, all it has is a well.

CWA completed a major renovation on the unit to make it as water-efficient as possible several years ago, but lacked the funds to pay for pumping until last year, when we were finally able to flood 200 acres. It had been dry so long that it took a long time – and a lot of money – to flood, but the results were gratifying. “The birds showed up immediately,” said CWA Regional Biologist Robert Eddings.

CWA set up panel blinds on islands and offered hunting through the Hunt Program – 42 hunters participated in 13

hunts. The place was packed with birds, though hunters struggled mightily with the mud.

Now help is on the way for both flood-up and hunters: CWA has been awarded a state Wildlife Conservation Board grant that will fund a solar array to power the well, as well as pay for permanent pit blinds and a wheelchair-accessible blind, gravel paths to the blinds, a gravel parking lot, a bird-cleaning station and check station.

Ultimately, CWA plans to flood 450 acres at Badger Almond, providing an even larger water footprint than the 300-acre Houchin unit. The importance of this cannot be overstated: Hunters in Southern California are hungry for places to hunt, and birds deserve to reclaim a piece of a once-vast wetland.

Additional help may be on the way, too. The Central Valley Joint Venture is exploring the feasibility of extending a pipeline to Badger Almond, giving it access to precious surface water.

Of course, the future is not without challenges. Implementation of the state’s Sustainable Groundwater Management Act threatens draconian curtailments of groundwater use for duck clubs in the region over time. But CWA’s advocacy team has been fighting to ensure that wetlands continue to get a share of the San Joaquin Valley’s liquid gold and is working with other wetlands groups to introduce related legislation in 2023. 🦋



CWA PASSES RIGOROUS SCRUTINY



In 2021, California Waterfowl joined a network of over 450 accredited land trusts across the nation that have demonstrated their commitment to professional excellence and to maintaining the public’s trust in their work.

Recognition by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission “demonstrates CWA’s commitment to permanent conservation of wetlands and waterfowl breeding habitat in California,” said CWA President John Carlson Jr.

CWA provided extensive documentation and was subject to a comprehensive third-party evaluation prior to achieving this distinction. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission awarded accreditation, signifying its confidence that CWA’s lands will be protected forever.

MAJOR DONOR PROFILE

There are some things you do that change the course of your life forever. For John Wilhelm, it was taking a three-month trip to Japan after he graduated from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale with degrees in biology and marketing. “It was the first time I was ever west of the Mississippi River. It just blew me away,” he said.

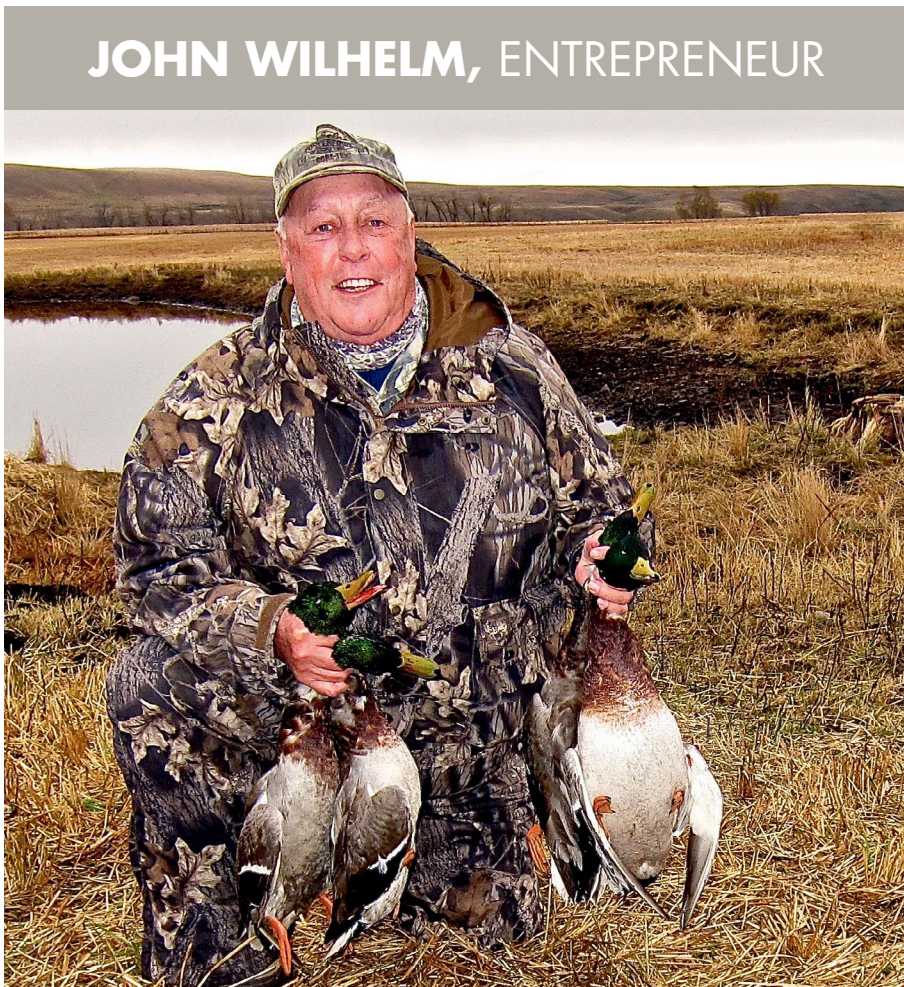
He was so profoundly transformed by the cultural exchange that he wanted other young people to have the same opportunity he’d had, so he went to work for a company that facilitated cultural exchanges for young Americans abroad.

Then in 1980, he started his own company, Intrax, to focus on bringing young people from around the globe to America, focusing on students, au pair services and work-based exchanges. That company now operates in 60 countries and has offices in Tokyo, Berlin and Santiago, Chile.

Wilhelm, now 78, has begun phasing out of the business, gradually handing the reins to his partner. But his passion for sharing with others the opportunities he has enjoyed remains undimmed. That’s why he is a California Waterfowl Gold Benefactor and a member of CWA’s Pintail Legacy Society – people who’ve chosen to name CWA in their estate plans.

Wilhelm started hunting as a kid. His dad didn’t hunt, but he and his brother got involved in hunting through Boy Scouts, going out on excursions where they’d share a single-shot J.C. Higgins shotgun.

“As a young kid, I would lie in my bed reading *Field & Stream*, *Outdoor Life* and *Sports Afield* and dream of the places I read about,”



JOHN WILHELM, ENTREPRENEUR

he said. “Late at night each fall, I would listen to waves of Canada geese flying south. Their desire to migrate matched my wanderlust to be somewhere I wasn’t. Waterfowl became my animal spirit.”

He didn’t start to hunt ducks in earnest until he moved to Salt Lake City, where he met some men who enjoyed hunting ducks on the marshes around the Great Salt Lake.

When he moved to California, he discovered the rich duck hunting opportunities to be had here, starting out at refuges – particularly the Gray Lodge Wildlife Area. When his business partner from Japan – Takeshi Yokota – relocated to California, Wilhelm got him into duck hunting and fly fishing, his other outdoor passion.

Wilhelm got involved with CWA the way so many of us have, by going to his local banquet in Marin

County. The things that drew him to CWA were its youth programs, habitat work and programs like Egg Salvage to support the state’s mallard population – all things that would improve the future of duck hunting in California.

Soon he advanced to a more philanthropic mode of giving. He set up a charitable giving account through his Schwab brokerage and made CWA one of the major recipients. And he put CWA in his trust. “I’m sure CWA will receive a sizable amount of money when I’m gone,” he said. That money will help ensure the kind of future he wants to see for duck hunting in California.

“I just think if you live in California and you like to hunt ducks, there’s no better association to be a part of than CWA,” he said. “I think everything they do is worthwhile.” 🦆

OUR MAJOR DONORS

As of March 31, 2022

California Waterfowl is proud to have the support of nearly 1,300 Major Donors, and it is our great honor to thank these individuals, companies, organizations and foundations for their extraordinary level of commitment. We wouldn't be here without them.

For information about our Major Donor Program, please visit calwaterfowl.org/donate, or call Vice President for Fund and Membership Development Scott Mueller at 916-648-1406, ext. 142.

Many Major Donors are also members of CWA's Pintail Legacy Society, supporters who have chosen to leave gifts through their estates. For information about estate and other tax-advantaged giving, please contact Gordon L. Nelson, CPA, CFP®, at 435-213-9986 or plannedgiving@calwaterfowl.org.

‡ denotes Life Member (calwaterfowl.org/join) ◊ denotes Pintail Legacy Society member (calwaterfowl.org/donate/legacy-society) * denotes deceased

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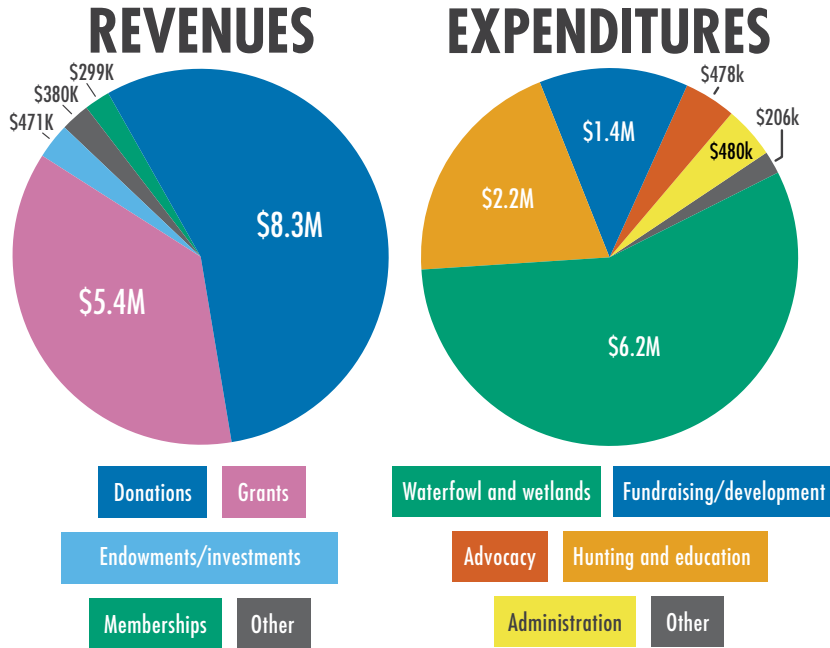




Photo by Wayne Tirock

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