

**SACRAMENTO RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE MOWING GUIDELINES:  
AVOIDING & MINIMIZING IMPACTS TO GROUND NESTING BIRDS**

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This mowing strategy allows the Refuge to maintain habitat for wildlife, maintain Refuge access roads and public use trails, and build fire breaks while avoiding or minimizing impacts to open cup ground nesting birds.

## **JUSTIFICATION**

It is imperative that the Refuge maintains restoration sites for future wildlife habitat benefits. Therefore, invasive weeds must be controlled to reduce competition to the native woody and herbaceous plants for space, sunlight, water, and nutrients. It is also important for the Refuge to maintain access roads, public use hiking trails, and fire breaks. Mowing permits vehicle use without creating potential fire ignition hazards from dry vegetation contacting hot exhaust systems and oily/greasy under carriages. Mowing is also useful for maintaining hiking trails for safe public access to wildlife viewing areas, and for creating low impact fire breaks (i.e., bare ground or gravel compared to disking), where feasible.

## **RATIONAL**

We assume peak nesting activities for open-cup ground nesting birds to occur during the early spring through mid-summer period, that is, March 15 through July 15. Accordingly, implementation of the mowing strategy described below will greatly reduce mowing impacts to ground nesters.

## **MOWING STRATEGY**

Time mowing to avoid impacting ground nesting birds. The objective is to identify areas that require mowing as soon as possible and begin mowing them prior to any nest building activities. Keeping vegetation mowed from the beginning will discourage most, if not all, nesting attempts in these areas. Initial and subsequent mowing should be timed to maintain vegetation height less than 12 inches through the nesting period of March 15 through July 15.

In some cases roads are identified which do not require mowing until late summer and fall flood-up (i.e., Llano Seco Unit). These roads are purposely left for open cup ground nesting birds in the spring and early summer, then mowed in the late summer and early fall to provide loafing and foraging habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and sandhill cranes.