

This article was originally printed in *Outdoor California* magazine, January - February 1999.

State Wildlife Areas - Valuable Places for Wildlife and Visitors

By Tom Blankinship

Ever sit at home wondering where you could go to get away from it all, but someplace that wasn't too far from home? Ever have the urge to go sit in a "natural" setting enjoying the peace and serenity for a moment of calm in this crazy world? How about hunting, fishing or watching wildlife? The opportunities await you at California's wildlife areas.

The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) administers nearly 840,000 acres of wildlife habitat, and more than 600,000 of those acres rest in designated "wildlife areas." The state owns about two-thirds of this acreage while the remainder is managed under agreements with other public agencies. For California residents and visitors, this means they have more than 600,000 acres of some of the most unique and productive wildlife habitats in the state to enjoy.

The 600,000 acres divides into 106 wildlife areas scattered throughout the state, most located in central and northern California. Those owned and managed solely by the state range in size from a few acres to the 46,862-acre Tehama Wildlife Area in Tehama County. Three wildlife areas managed in conjunction with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management total over 260,000 acres.

The state acquired these wildlife areas to protect and enhance habitat for wildlife species, and to provide for wildlife-associated public uses. These lands provide habitat for a great variety of plant and animal species, including many listed as threatened or endangered. Some wildlife areas, such as Tehama and Slinkard-Little Antelope, protect important winter ranges for migratory deer herds. Others emphasize wetland habitat. Since the vast majority of wetlands that once occurred in California have been eliminated for farmland, urban development and other uses, a number of our wildlife areas were purchased to preserve some of the remaining wetland acreage or to restore wetlands where they once occurred.

Wildlife areas have been purchased through a variety of funding sources, including bond acts that were passed by California's voters to protect wildlife habitat. At 18 of the larger areas permanent staff have been assigned. Most of these lands contain intensively managed wetland components. The federal-state cost share program called Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration, pays for staff at 14 of the 18 wildlife areas. The federal portion of these funds (75 percent) comes from an excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition, and the state matches it with 25 percent derived from hunting license and tag fees. Much of the other funding for the major wetland wildlife areas is administered through DFG's Comprehensive Wetland Habitat Program funded by taxes on cigarettes and from environmental license plate fees.

DFG uses different management methods on different wildlands, ranging, from a custodial type of management (where the goal is to simply protect the area as it exists from degrading activities) to annual intensive habitat manipulation. On the areas with significant wetlands and staff, management can be complex as it includes a variety of habitats. On these areas, management emphasizes seasonal wetlands for migrating waterfowl and other birds, but also includes permanent wetlands and uplands to meet the needs of all resident and migratory wildlife.

The management of the wildlife areas results in a great variety of high-quality wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing opportunities for the public. A number of areas also are used for outdoor education, featuring public tours of the areas. The larger wetland areas tend to be the most popular for both viewing and hunting, because of large concentrations of waterfowl in the fall and winter months. One of the areas that attracts many visitors is Gray Lodge Wildlife Area in Butte County, southwest of Gridley. Gray Lodge attracts about 25,000 bird watchers, 15,000 hunters, and 12,000 anglers annually.

No entry fees are required at most state wildlife areas. However, modest fees for hunting (and in some cases for wildlife viewing) are required at the intensively managed wetland areas. Information on all these areas, including a listing of areas by county, special regulations and directions to most of them, fees required for daily entry, hunting days, game species allowed, and contact phone numbers are listed in the DFG regulations booklet: [Hunting and Other Public Uses on State and Federal](#)

[Areas.](#)

[Conditions of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)