



# COSUMNES River Preserve

## THE COSUMNES RIVER Sierras to the Delta

Just over 80 miles long, the Cosumnes River begins in the great Sierra Nevada mountains, deep in El Dorado National Forest. Its headwaters rest at an elevation of 7,600 feet and the river is fueled mostly by rain runoff and some snowmelt. The three forks of the Cosumnes flow through lush conifer forests and tumble over the huge rocks of granite canyons. As the river drops into the drier foothill environment, it coalesces into one channel. Oaks and gray pines dominate the landscape.

Shortly after the confluence of the three forks, the Cosumnes River crosses an earthquake fault, falling 30 feet. The river cascades over a 20-foot waterfall, just below the town of Latrobe. As it enters the alluvial plain of California's Central Valley, it slows. The water percolates into the soil of the sandy riverbed, feeding the aquifer below. The Preserve's Visitor Center is less than one-half mile from the mouth of the Cosumnes River. It joins the Mokelumne River and these waters become part of the vast network of waterways that is the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Water from the delta ultimately flows through San Francisco Bay and into the Pacific Ocean.



**The landscapes of the upper Cosumnes are far different from those near the Preserve's Visitor Center.**  
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**A bird's eye view of the lower Cosumnes.**  
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## Then and Now

Miwok Indians once thrived along the Cosumnes. They were attracted by the rich hunting and fishing grounds, as well as the abundant acorns, which formed the base of their diet. Like the native wildlife, the Miwoks were sustained by the bounty provided by the river's natural flooding. Nineteenth century settlers reshaped the floodplain of the lower river and transformed the forests and wetlands into landscapes better suited for farming and cattle grazing. Agriculture remains the predominant use of the lands surrounding the lower watershed.

Today the Cosumnes River is the only unregulated river to make its way from the Sierra Mountains to the valley below. Because of this, its floodplain is closer to a natural state than any other in the region. This rare free-flowing system provides an opportunity for naturalists and scientists to observe the primal state of California's Great Central Valley.

# Participate

## Visit

When visiting the Preserve, please remember that the overarching goal is to protect sensitive wildlife and habitat. Access to most of the Preserve is restricted but areas that are open to the public offer an excellent sampling of the unique habitats found within our boundaries. The Preserve's public areas are open for your enjoyment between **sunrise and sunset**, every day of the year. Visitors are asked to **stay on the designated trails** and follow posted guidelines that include: dogs and pets are not allowed, bicycles cannot be ridden on the trails, and camping and fires are prohibited. For a complete list of Preserve rules, please review our website, pick up a *Trails Guide* or investigate the kiosks located in the parking lots.

The **Visitor Center** houses interpretive displays that describe the natural and cultural history of the region, as well as the restoration and management of Preserve lands. The covered deck on the south side of the building is a great place to enjoy a picnic lunch. The center is kept open by volunteers for regular weekend hours and it is often open during the week when staff are present.

Two trails begin at the Visitor Center. Take the **Cosumnes River Walk**, a 3-mile dirt nature trail that ventures through a variety of Central Valley habitats. The River Walk is prone to closures during the flood season. There is also the **Lost Slough Wetlands Walk**, a paved 1-mile loop that is universally accessible. The Wetlands Walk offers excellent viewing of migratory birds during the fall and winter months. Both trails are open sunrise to sunset, year-round.

Look for our **guided activities** that occur regularly. These volunteer-led experiences have a variety of themes that include bird viewing, nature photography and plant identification.

**Enjoy the river.** Launch your canoe, kayak or any non-gas powered boat from the Preserve's dock. To access the dock, follow the 200-yard paved path south from the visitor parking lot.

## Volunteer

**Habitat Restoration Team (HRT)** - Join us for restoration workdays. Prepare for hard work, lots of fun and opportunities to see parts of the Preserve that few get to experience. Activities include planting native vegetation, habitat monitoring, facility maintenance, and eradication of invasive plants.

**Naturalists** - Volunteer naturalists are an essential element to the operation of the Preserve's interpretive programs. They staff the Visitor Center on weekends, lead guided hikes, paddling trips, photo walks and conduct landscaping at the Visitor Center. Volunteer naturalists receive training about Central Valley wildlife, plants, history, and a variety of other topics.

**Biological Inventory** - No experience is needed to help with monitoring efforts. Opportunities include monthly bird counts, migratory waterfowl counts, wood duck and blue bird box monitoring, and an annual butterfly count.



HRT volunteers often work in closed areas of the Preserve.  
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# Protect

## Flora

The Preserve protects two extremely rare Central Valley plant communities: riparian, or streamside forests and freshwater marshes. Both have been reduced to less than 10% of their historic occurrence in California. Valley oaks form the forests' tall continuous canopy, while vines of wild grape adorn the trees, giving the forest an appearance that John Muir described as "tropical luxuriance." The marshes bordering the forest support vigorous growth of tules and cattails. Annual grasslands, rare vernal pools and cultivated fields are other plant communities found on the Preserve.



The Preserve is a designated National Natural Monument.

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## Fauna

The ideal habitat found in this region supports numerous species of animals. A fall run of salmon make their way up the unregulated Cosumnes. Common wetland mammals include river otter, beaver and muskrat. The rare giant garter snake makes its home in the marshes and adjacent uplands. Raccoon, black-tailed mule deer and mink seek shelter in the riparian forests.

The Preserve has been declared as an area of global significance for birds. More than 250 species of birds have been recorded on the Preserve, including several nesting pairs of Swainson's hawks. The winter marshes support impressive numbers of greater and lesser sandhill cranes, Ross', white-fronted, Aleutian, and Canada geese, tundra swans, and a plethora of ducks. Birds such as great blue herons, black-crowned night herons and white-tailed kites are common.



Sandhill cranes, which are often found foraging in the corn fields at Staten Island, are a featured attraction in the fall and winter.

©Cosumnes River Preserve, Staff Photo

## Farming

The Preserve recognizes and emphasizes the habitat values associated with continued farming in the Cosumnes River corridor, particularly the benefits for ducks, Swainson's hawks, and sandhill cranes. These farming activities highlight the notion that humans are a part of the land and that our activities can be **environmentally compatible**. The Preserve's partners have purchased both property and conservation easements on critical farmlands in the region.

## Funding

The Preserve's partners contribute resources that support the operations of the project and dedicated volunteers help accomplish restoration and outreach goals. But we also rely on the generosity of the visitors who come to appreciate these habitats and share the goal of protecting them. **To make a donation** to the Cosumnes River Preserve, please contact us using the information on the back of this brochure or, while visiting, place money in any of the donation boxes.

# Partner

## Management

Over 46,000 acres are managed by a partnership of nine different agencies and organizations. These partners have signed a Cooperative Management Agreement that allows the contributors to act as one unit. The partnership contributes to the planning and operation of the Preserve, and this effort is coordinated out of the on-site office, located at the Visitor Center.

The nine partners of the Preserve are listed below:

**The Nature Conservancy**  
**U.S. Bureau of Land Management**  
**Ducks Unlimited**  
**California Department of Fish and Game**  
**Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks**  
**California State Lands Commission**  
**California Department of Water Resources**  
**Galt Joint Union Elementary School District**  
**Natural Resources Conservation Service**



Restoration efforts of the Cosumnes' watershed have been ongoing for more than 20 years.

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## Map & Location

The Cosumnes River Preserve rests between two of Northern California's metropolitan areas: Sacramento and Stockton. Just 20 miles south of the State's Capital, the nearest city is Galt.

**Directions:** The Preserve's Visitor Center is easily accessed from Interstate 5. Take the Twin Cities Road exit and go east. Travel approximately one mile and turn south on to Franklin Boulevard. Continue one and a half miles down Franklin Boulevard and park in the Visitor Parking lot.



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