



COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE

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Cosumnes River Preserve — Driving Tour

Welcome

Welcome to the Cosumnes River Preserve! This self-guided driving tour offers visitors an opportunity to experience the scope of the Preserve's protected lands, which are centralized around the lower Cosumnes River watershed.

These directions assume that you are beginning your tour at the Preserve's Visitor Center. Please drive carefully and be attentive to other traffic. Public access on the Preserve is currently focused on two developed trails, a boat dock for paddling and the Visitor Center. The other parts of the Preserve are accessible only by guided tours. In addition, many areas are utilized for wildlife friendly farming, which may be owned privately. You are encouraged to enjoy the Preserve from the paved public roads.

Please Do Not Trespass.

Also, while the major roadways generally remain open, many sections of the Preserve (including the two developed trails) can become impassible during the wet season in winter and spring.

We invite you to further explore the Preserve by participating in special events and activities. For more information about Preserve activities or volunteer opportunities: call (916) 684-2816, email to info@cosumnes.org, or stop in at the Visitor Center.

The Lower Cosumnes River

Nestled along the last free flowing river from the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the Cosumnes River Preserve is one of California's largest remaining examples of native Central Valley habitats and wildlife. Characterized by a mosaic of grassland, seasonal and permanent wetlands, riparian forest and valley oak woodland, less than five percent of this historic habitat exists today. Most of these landscapes have been converted to agriculture and urban land uses. Urbanization pressures remain extremely high in the Cosumnes River basin.

From its head waters in the El Dorado National Forest, the Cosumnes River flows through the Central Valley, converging with the Mokelumne River and Sacramento Delta.

Due to the nature of the unregulated river, Preserve visitors can witness the dynamic natural flood process and abundant biological diversity which characterized much of the Great Central Valley prior to European settlement.

Here, where the uplands merge with the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the Preserve provides significant habitat for wildlife, as well as important opportunities for research, education and recreation.

COOPERATORS

Bureau of Land Management, The Nature Conservancy Ducks Unlimited, California Department of Fish and Game,
California Department of Water Resources, California Wildlife Conservation Board, County of Sacramento, Department of Regional Parks,
California State Lands Commission & Natural Resource Conservation Service

The Preserve's location is along the Pacific Flyway — a migration route used by more than 50 percent of North America's migratory birds — as well as its variety of habitats within the river's floodplain results in hundreds of resident and migratory wildlife species inhabiting the area. Wildlife viewing opportunities vary with seasonal changes.

Visitor Center (on Franklin Boulevard)

Surrounded by wetlands and riparian forest, the Preserve's Visitor Center is located on Franklin Boulevard, approximately two miles south of Twin Cities Road. Originally constructed in 1993, the building was destroyed by an arson fire in December 1995. Within two years, the center was rebuilt and reopened. It is the central meeting place on the Preserve and provides visitors with interpretive displays and information about Central Valley habitats and wildlife.

The Center is open most weekends from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. In July and August Visitor Center hours are 8 a.m. to 12 noon.

Lost Slough Wetlands Walk & Boardwalk Trail

The Lost Slough Wetlands Walk is a 1-mile loop trail beginning and ending at the Visitor Center, and takes you through wetlands and riparian forest. It is open sunrise to sunset, year-round, for self-guided walks. The Wetlands Walk is a paved trail and is universally accessible.

The Boardwalk, ½ mile round trip, is accessible off of the Wetlands Walk. The Boardwalk is open to the public daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The short walk along the boardwalk to the viewing platform offers visitors a firsthand journey into wetland habitat. Visible in and around the tule-filled marshes, some common bird species include pintail, mallard, American coot, cinnamon teal, great blue heron, great egret, red-winged blackbird, black-necked stilt, marsh wren, northern harrier and American bittern.

Cosumnes River Walk

The Cosumnes River Walk is a 3-mile loop trail beginning and ending at the Visitor Center. It takes you through wetlands, riparian forest, grasslands, and to the Cosumnes River. Watch for mammal tracks and scat in the mud and along the trail. Listen for and witness a variety of raptors soaring above and perching in the tree canopies. It is open sunrise to sunset, year-round, for self-guided walks. The River Walk is a dirt trail and is subject to flooding.

At this point, please get in your vehicles and drive...

1. North on Franklin Boulevard, right on Desmond Road

Turn right on Desmond Road, drive over the railroad tracks. The seasonal and permanent wetlands on the left and right are owned by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. They are managed exclusively for water bird habitat and feed.

During the winter, thousands of water birds can be seen using the ponds. Some overwinter at the site, while others stop to rest and feed before winging their way further down the Pacific Flyway. This area is a favorite feeding ground for many raptor species, especially the northern harrier, which glides low over the marsh in search of prey. The gate on the right leads to "The Barn," the Preserve's staging area for habitat restoration activities.

2. Desmond Road east, left on Bruceville Road

At the end of Desmond Road, turn left onto Bruceville Road. The ranch house on your right serves as the Preserve's Farm Center. Initiated in 1996, the innovative, organic farm program invites wildlife by growing beneficial crops and providing habitat buffer zones between cultivated fields. Each year over 1000 acres of organic rice is grown and harvested here. From September to March, the rice fields are favorite hangouts for Sandhill Cranes during their winter stay on the Preserve.

Heading north on Bruceville Road, watch along the power lines and on the communication tower for red-shouldered hawk, American kestrel, western meadowlark, golden eagle and peregrine falcon.

3. Bruceville Road, right on Twin Cities Road

From Bruceville Road, turn right onto Twin Cities Road. The two extensive agriculture parcels on your right are privately owned and operated. However, The Nature Conservancy holds conservation easements on these properties. Conservation easements preserve beneficial habitat by preventing urban development and by restricting farmers from planting vineyards or orchards.

East on Twin Cities Road, after passing a sand mining operation on your right, you will cross several bridges. These waterways include a couple of meandering channels of the Cosumnes River as well as Laguna Creek. During high flood flows, it is common for the waters in these channels to merge into one large rushing "lake." Some wildlife species inhabiting these riparian corridors include great-horned owl, black-tailed deer, raccoon, fall-run Chinook salmon, coyote, mountain lion, Swainson's hawk, beaver, river otter and numerous types of water birds.

Immediately past the last bridge on your left, Laguna Creek flows southeasterly through a series of ponds and marshes toward the road. This property, which includes the vast grassland north of Laguna Creek, was acquired by The Nature Conservancy in 1998 and is managed as part of the Preserve.

Down Twin Cities Road past the power lines on the left is a large area of cultivated land. This property and the native grassland beyond is the site for the proposed Sun Lakes Village, a 1,500

acre retirement community. This urban development is currently under review by the Sacramento Local Agency Formation Commission and the City of Galt.

4. North on Highway 99

Continue east along Twin Cities Road, until you reach Highway 99. Take Highway 99 north, past Arno Road. You are driving through Valensin Ranch, which encompasses 4,300 acres on both sides of the highway. You are encouraged to enjoy the ranch from the paved public roads, but please do not trespass.

On the left is the western section of the ranch. This 1,200-acre parcel supports marshes, grassland, a heritage valley oak woodland and 300 acres of cultivated cropland, growing tomatoes and corn. A section of the parcel lies along the river.

On your right is the eastern section of the ranch. You will see Horseshoe Lake, fed by Badger Creek. In the spring and summer, hundreds of herons and egrets breed in colonies in the mature valley oaks. The dead trees, or snags, around the lake's perimeter and on its "island" reveal that the water level is higher today than historically. This may be the result of drainage changes that occurred when Highway 99 was constructed. This entire section of freeway was submerged and closed for two days during the January 1997 Flood.

5. Highway 99, east on Dillard Road

Exit Highway 99, and head east on Dillard Road. From Dillard Road at Highway 99, the ranch extends approximately two miles west, one mile south and four miles northeast. A resident pair of red-tailed hawks often perch in the trees on your left, along the power lines or atop the on-ramp lights.

Throughout the ranch and its adjacent lands, migrant Swainson's hawks appear to outnumber other raptor varieties during their breeding season in the spring and summer. Numerous Swainson's hawk nest sites have been documented on the ranch.

After passing a private property on your right, there is an old dairy site on the left. This property is part of the Costello/Cantrell Ranch, which extends north to the river and contains valuable oak woodland, riparian forest and agriculture land. The property was proposed for the development of two 18-hole golf courses; it was purchased by The Nature Conservancy in 1998.

6. Dillard Road East

Follow Dillard Road past the dairy. The Valensin Ranch is located on both sides of the road, stretching as far as you can see to the right and to the riparian forest line along Deer Creek to the left. A large portion of the ranch's eastern section is grassland. Nearly all of the ranch's grasslands have been spared from the plow and remain native topography. As a result, the area's rich vernal pools are relatively undisturbed.

This vast grassland is home to a variety of wildlife. Watch for American kestrels and western meadowlarks on the fence posts as well as red-tailed and Swainson's hawks roosting atop the scattered oak trees. In the fall and winter, geese and Sandhill cranes can be seen (and heard) foraging on the grass or flying low in an undulating V-formation over the area. Coyote

populations are healthy on the ranch. Both resident packs and nomadic individuals can be spotted on the grassland as they hunt California ground squirrels and other small prey.

7. Right on Riley Road to Arno Road

Turn right onto Riley Road. The ranch is located on your right. This is a good place to notice the difference between leveled farmland and native topography. A resident pair of white-tailed, or black-shouldered, kites can often be seen hovering above, using their keen sight and hearing to search for rodents, insects and reptiles. Past the cluster of eucalyptus trees, the ranch extends to both sides of the road, which crosses the north and middle forks of Badger Creek. Initial restoration efforts are focusing on these stream corridors. Many wildlife species call this waterway and the adjacent upland their home, including red-winged, tricolor, yellow-headed and Brewer's blackbirds, beaver, coyote, raccoon, opossum, badger, ground squirrel, burrowing owl and an assortment of water and song birds.

Riley Road merges with and becomes Arno Road. Here, in the winter, a ferruginous hawk is a frequent site on the fence posts, grasslands, or power lines. Further south Arno Road takes a 90-degree turn to the west.

8. Arno Road West

After a short stretch of cultivated land, the Valensin Ranch is again on your right. More than 150 years ago, the ranch supported a bustling town called Hicksville, which served as a supply depot for prospectors and an entertainment and social center for area residents. The town was owned by Billy Hicks, a man who helped rescue survivors of the Donner Party and who had one of the largest landholdings in California. Hicks' property was said to stretch from several miles west of today's Highway 99 to well past the town of Ione in Amador County. Hick's daughter, Alice, married Count Valensin, and the couple eventually took over the ranch and town operations. Descendants of the Valensin Family still reside in the area.

The cemetery plot on your right was donated more than 120 years ago by the Hicks/Valensin Family. The cemetery serves as an important burial site for Cosumnes Miwok. It also serves as a non-Native American cemetery. It is open to the public.

9. Arno Road to Highway 99

If you head north on Highway 99, toward Sacramento, you will again pass through the heart of the Valensin Ranch, with Horseshoe Lake on your right. Continuing north just past Dillard Road, you will cross the overflow channel of the Cosumnes River. This was the river's primary route prior to 1920. Several agriculture tracts exist in the area, and there are beautiful stands of heritage oak woodland and mixed riparian forest. On your right is the Cantrell/Costello Ranch. Watch for fox, coyote and black-tailed deer strutting through the oak woodland and agriculture fields.

To return to the Preserve's Visitor Center, head south on Highway 99 then west on Twin Cities Road. Turn south on Franklin Boulevard and follow that to the Center.

Thank you for visiting the Cosumnes River Preserve!