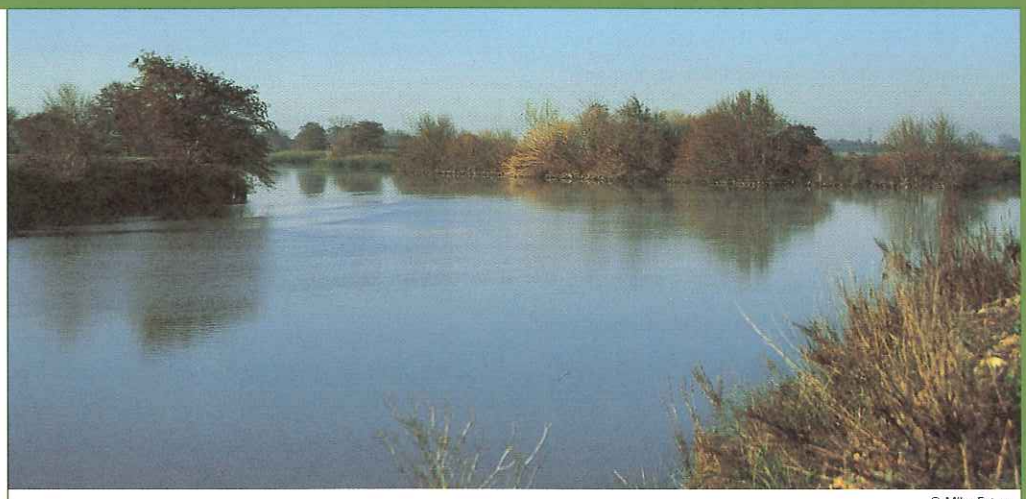
The Nature Conservancy
SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

places we protect





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One of the last free-flowing rivers in California, the Cosumnes nurtures both natural and human communities. Through research and innovation, The Nature Conservancy and its partners are protecting and restoring this biologically rich and varied landscape.

Fast Facts

Location: On the western slope of the Sierra Nevada, approximately 20 miles south of Sacramento.

Size: River is 80 miles long. Watershed is 800 square miles. The Cosumnes River Preserve covers nearly 50,000 acres (62 square miles).

At Stake: Valley oak forest, blue oak forest, Swainson's hawk, vernal pools, Chinook salmon, Pacific lamprey, giant garter snake, river otter, sandhill crane and other wintering and year-round birds.

Threats: Urbanization, commercial development, groundwater pumping, incompatible agricultural practices.

The Cosumnes River

From its origins in the western Sierra Nevada, the Cosumnes River carves its way through the foothills, then traces a broad, shallow path through California's Central Valley. After nourishing a rich mosaic of farms, ranches and natural habitats, it merges with the meandering channels of the San Joaquin Delta on the way to the ocean.

Winter and spring rains often push the Cosumnes over its banks into neighboring marshes and grasslands, providing habitat for thousands of birds, including the magnificent greater sandhill crane. Spring reveals a bevy of plants and animals emerging from their winter homes before summer heat dries the land. Year-round, native fish traverse the river, with Chinook salmon beginning to rebound after years of decline.

For more than a century, agriculture has coexisted with the river's large wildlife populations, sharing the lush riverside forests, rich soils and open spaces flanking the Cosumnes without causing major disturbances to the watershed's natural communities and native species. However, this delicate system is at risk from development, overpumping of groundwater and a variety of other threats associated with the Great Central Valley's burgeoning population. Twenty years ago, the Conservancy and partners established the now nearly 50,000-acre Cosumnes River Preserve to protect part of this unique landscape forever.

Managing the Land for Work and Wildlife

Since 1984 the Conservancy has acquired land, established conservation easements and restored wetlands, forests and natural processes to protect ecologically significant portions of the Cosumnes River and its watershed. We are also working with local

Conservation Profile

Strategies: Work with farmers, ranchers and other local partners to safeguard and restore unique valley oak streamside ecosystems and freshwater wetlands, while demonstrating compatibility among agriculture, recreation and conservation of the natural environment. Acquire land, secure conservation easements, conduct research and partner with a range of community organizations, public and private partners and academic institutions. Lead in the development of solutions that restore a natural hydrology to the river.

Results: Creation of 40,000 acres of conservation land as part of the Cosumnes River Preserve. Participation in the study and application of wildlife-friendly farming and ranching practices at several demonstration sites. Restoration of 1,500 acres of riparian forest throughout preserve.

Partners: Bureau of Land Management; California Department of Fish and Game; Ducks Unlimited, Inc.; California Department of Water Resources; Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks, Open Space and Recreation; Wildlife Conservation Board.

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farmers and ranchers to explore ways in which they can remain economically productive while protecting natural habitats and the wildlife that need them.

Take, for instance, the 12,000-acre Howard Ranch in southeast Sacramento County, where a working relationship with the owners led Conservancy scientists to study how cattle grazing affects rare vernal pools located on the property. Two years later, the scientists have concluded that grazing may actually benefit these habitats since it mimics the behavior of animals like deer and tule elk that once grazed the Central Valley and serves to suppress invasive, non-native weeds.

In a similar vein, Jim and Sally Shanks mimic the natural phenomenon of flooding to convert several thousand acres of the Staten Island Ranch into a winter haven for more than 106 species of birds, including threatened greater sandhill cranes. Implementing this and other techniques to welcome avian visitors has resulted in 15 percent of the Central Valley's greater sandhill crane population wintering on Staten Island each year. The Nature Conservancy is working closely with the Shankses to ensure that their legacy continues and to provide a model for farmers who wish to manage a successful operation and benefit wildlife.

Exploring new ideas at places like the Howard Ranch and Staten Island complements the traditional acquisition, protection and restoration strategies utilized by the Conservancy during more than 50 years of conserving landscapes like the Cosumnes River watershed. This mix of old and new approaches will enable the Conservancy and partners to safeguard even more of this extraordinary place and secure its dual role as food source and wildlife sanctuary.

How You Can Help

Visit the Cosumnes River Preserve. Explore the wetlands, oak woodlands and unique beauty of this remarkable landscape in California's Great Central Valley.

Become a member. The success of The Nature Conservancy depends on support from local communities and people like you.

Make a special gift. Contribute directly to the success of the Cosumnes River Preserve.

Stay informed. Visit nature.org/california or call [415] 777.0487.

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