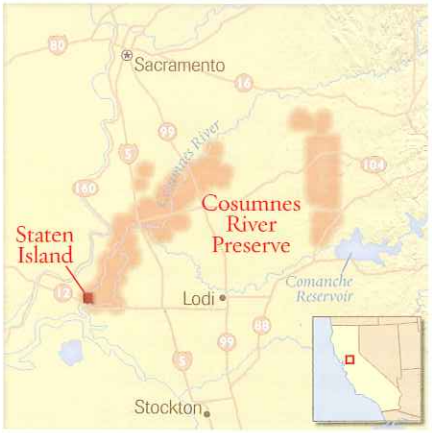
The Nature Conservancy
SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

conservation spotlight



Fast Facts

LOCATION: San Joaquin County near the Cosumnes River Preserve within the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta

SIZE: 9,200 acres (14 square miles)

PARTNERS: California Department of Water Resources, California Bay-Delta Authority Ecosystem Restoration Program

WHAT TO SEE: Greater and lesser sandhill cranes, tundra swans, white-fronted and Canada geese, great blue herons, egrets, pintails, mallards, white-tailed kites



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Every fall, legions of sandhill cranes migrate south to California's Great Central Valley, but their seasonal habitat is rapidly disappearing. Two farm managers near Sacramento are providing these fascinating birds with a place to rest and working with The Nature Conservancy to ensure that the cranes always have a winter home in California.

M&T Staten Ranch: Crops and Cranes

From the air California's Great Central Valley looks like a work of art. It is, in fact, a vast mosaic of crops and natural habitats that sustain significant populations of native birds, fish and mammals. Staten Island Ranch has been part of this mosaic for nearly 100 years. Today, the property produces large amounts of grain for distribution all over the United States. And in the winter, after the harvest, Staten Island managers flood the fields to "grow" another very important crop — greater and lesser sandhill cranes. Approximately 15 percent of the threatened greater sandhill crane population in the Central Valley winters on Staten Island, making the property one of the most important feeding and roosting sites for these ancient birds.

In December 2002 The Nature Conservancy established an affiliated organization, Conservation Farms & Ranches, to purchase and manage Staten Island. Working closely with existing management, the Conservancy is ensuring that Staten Island continues to grow crops — and support these magnificent birds.

An Ancient Migration

Every evening of every day on the cusp of fall, sandhill cranes return to California's Great Central Valley. No one knows how long they've been wintering in the mild tule fog and Delta grasslands and marshes, but fossils of these oldest-known living birds date back 55 million years.

Greater sandhill cranes are a threatened species in California. Two Conservancy studies conducted in 2003 found that Staten Island provides a winter home for



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approximately 15 percent of the Central Valley's population of greater sandhill cranes. The studies suggest that one reason thousands of cranes return to this working farm is that the farm has proven a safe harbor year after year. Sustainable farming, the studies conclude, is both profitable and wildlife-friendly, making the ranch a model for accommodating wildlife in an agricultural landscape.

"We never lose sight of the birds."

Jim Shanks has been managing Staten Island for nearly 50 years. His wife Sally and he have shaped their farming programs to suit the needs of the cranes — without sacrificing agricultural production. The Shankses' farming methods help create a unique harmony between Staten Island's human and natural communities. Instead of clearing crop residue after the harvest, the Shankses chop it up and leave it to decompose over the winter, providing food for the cranes, improving the soil and lowering labor and fuel costs.

The Nature Conservancy is working with the Shankses to understand their proven methods on Staten Island and the resulting impact on the cranes. Their farming practices could serve as a model for farmers throughout the Delta who are interested in conserving natural habitats while managing a successful farming operation.

As more land in the area is converted to vineyards, orchards, turf farms and urban development, the success of Staten Island decisively demonstrates that productive economic activity can coexist with good habitat. So long as awareness of wildlife and habitat needs are woven into farming practices, there will always be a place in the Delta for sandhill cranes to roost and forage — and for Californians to observe and celebrate their annual return, a migration as inevitable as the seasons.

How You Can Help

Visit the Cosumnes River Preserve. See the splendid greater and lesser sandhill cranes every October through February. Contact the preserve at [916] 684.2816 or info@cosumnes.org.

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 Conservancy's California program.

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

The Cosumnes River Preserve

Established by The Nature Conservancy in 1984, the Cosumnes River Preserve encompasses nearly 50,000 acres of wildlife-rich Delta habitat in southeastern Sacramento County. Working closely with seven governmental and nonprofit partners, the Conservancy is safeguarding and restoring the preserve's freshwater wetlands and protecting the increasingly rare valley oaks that dot the landscape. The Cosumnes River Preserve also demonstrates compatibility among agriculture, recreation and the natural environment. For more information, please contact the Cosumnes River Preserve Visitor Center at [916] 684.2816, or send e-mail to info@cosumnes.org. The Visitor Center is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

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