

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Water and Power
for the oversight field hearing on
“Assessing the Impacts of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act”

March 24, 2006

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My name is Campbell Ingram, Program Manager for the California Water Initiative of The Nature Conservancy's California chapter.

I thank the Members of the Committee for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Conservancy's habitat conservation work in California's Great Central Valley, and how that work relates to the Central Valley Project Improvement Act.

First, a few words about the organization I am here to represent.

The Nature Conservancy is an international, nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of biological diversity. Our mission is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. Our on-the-ground conservation work is carried out in all 50 states and in 27 foreign countries and is supported by approximately one million individual members. We have helped conserve nearly 15 million acres of land in the United States and Canada and more than 102 million acres with local partner organizations globally.

The Conservancy owns and manages approximately 1,400 preserves throughout the United States—the largest private system of nature sanctuaries in the world. We recognize, however, that our mission cannot be achieved by core protected areas alone. Therefore, our projects increasingly seek to accommodate compatible human uses, and especially in the developing world, to address sustained human well-being.

Second, I'd like to tell you what motivates us to work in California's Great Central Valley.

Due to its distinctive Mediterranean climate (cool wet winters and warm dry summers) found in only five areas around the globe, and unique geography, California as a whole is a veritable “hot spot” of biodiversity--home to plants, animals and natural communities that exist nowhere else on earth.

Even in the heavily used and dramatically altered Great Central Valley, viable remnants of these unique communities and species remain.

In the grasslands, vernal pools housing entire unique communities survive on working ranches, in the riparian forest remnants, migratory songbirds are starting to reappear, in the remaining wetlands migratory waterfowl show up in numbers sufficient to allow hunting, and in some rivers salmon still pursue their arduous life cycle.

The 15 million acre Central Valley was once home to over 7 million acres of grasslands, 1 million acres of riparian woodlands, 2 million acres of wetlands and 2 million acres of desert scrub. Most of that is, of course, now gone.

According to CSU Chico, since 1900, we've lost about 93% of the wetlands, 87% of the riparian habitat, three quarters of the desert scrub, just over half the grassland, and a quarter of the upland hardwood forests. We've lost virtually all of the million or so acres of the floodplain habitat not specifically characterized as riparian.

According to the Chico State statistics, much of this loss occurred after 1945. It is very likely that the construction of the Central Valley Project played a role in the post-1945 habitat losses.

No sane person I know entertains any notion of turning back the clock a century or more. However, we can take—and are taking--reasonable steps to hold on to, add to, and care for what pieces of our natural heritage we have left. The quality of life of current and future generations will be better if we do.

Our work in the central valley is a part of that effort. The Nature Conservancy has about 30 people on the ground working in

the Central Valley and over the last three years has raised between \$2.5 and \$3 million each year in private money to support our efforts.

In passing the CVPIA, in 1992, the Congress and the President agreed that a new partnership needed to be forged to restore some of what had been lost. The Nature Conservancy is a partner in implementing certain portions of the Act.

Since 1998, The Nature Conservancy has implemented 9 projects through the Section 3406 (b)(1) Other program to restore habitat for imperiled upland species that have been negatively impacted by CVP-related activities. Just over \$3.7 million of program money has leveraged more than \$54 million from private, state and other federal sources. This has resulted in the protection of almost 100,000 acres of Central Valley land. We have also used a similar amount, about \$4 million, from other CVPIA programs, which has leveraged over \$29 million in funds from other sources to implement 12 additional projects.

I must add here, that all of our conservation work is in conjunction with willing participants/sellers.

The emphasis of most of these projects has been to encourage and maintain, through the purchase of conservation easements, wildlife friendly agricultural practices. At our 45,000 acre Cosumnes River Preserve in Sacramento County almost 95% of the acreage is working farm or ranch land.

In 2003, TNC teamed up with a San Joaquin County rancher, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the State Wildlife Conservation Board and the Packard Foundation to protect what was then known as the Forster Ranch. Using key CVPIA contributions amounting to about \$550,000, leveraged with approximately \$2.5 million from other sources, 2,800 acres of prime vernal pool habitat was protected by purchasing a conservation easement and a rancher was able to invest in a working ranch that otherwise would have been too expensive.

These examples demonstrate that CVPIA money is a well leveraged, essential portion of our collective work to restore a small but valuable portion of what we inherited as a gift when we showed up in this Valley.

In conclusion, I'd like to say that while progress has been made, our work here together is clearly not done. Within the memory of people living today, this Valley offered significant opportunities to hunt, fish, and enjoy treasures of nature that exist nowhere else on earth.

Much of that is now gone. Some is left. If we are not careful, we will lose the rest. If we work together, we can ensure that our grandchildren can experience a bit of the world that our grandparents knew. And, that can happen in the context of a productive agricultural economy and vibrant cities and communities.

The Nature Conservancy looks forward to continuing to work together with others to make that vision a reality. The Central Valley Project Improvement Act is an important part of that effort. It may be possible to improve our efforts to implement it, but we should by no means abandon it.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my views.