

# **Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on Water & Power**

[water](#) - - Rep. Ken Calvert, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6204 - - (202) 225-8331

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## **Witness Statement**

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**STATEMENT OF  
RYAN BRODDRICK  
DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION PROGRAMS  
Valley/Bay CARE, Western Regional Office  
DUCKS UNLIMITED, INC.  
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES  
April 3, 2001**

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of Ducks Unlimited, Inc., the world's leading wetlands and waterfowl conservation organization, thank you for the opportunity to address the question of why it is important to direct private, state and federal resources towards improving the ecosystems in the State of California.

Since 1937, the mission of Ducks Unlimited has been to fulfill the annual life cycle of the needs of North American waterfowl by protecting, enhancing, restoring and managing important wetlands and associated uplands. To accomplish this mission it has been helpful to form alliances with a variety of public and private partners. Over the last 10 years in California it has been increasingly important to find opportunities to accomplish our mission for waterfowl within the broader context of improving the ecosystem overall. Our approach has been to focus on practical cooperative solutions to conservation challenges.

California, specifically the Central Valley, is one of the most important wintering waterfowl areas in the Pacific Flyway with up to 60 percent of the total duck and goose population using the Central Valley during their annual migration. The Central Valley consists of the Sacramento Valley in the north and the San Joaquin Valley in the South. The Valley extends approximately 400 miles from Red Bluff in the north to Bakersfield in the South. As an illustration of how unique California's role is in the Pacific Flyway, consider that in an average year, the Central Valley supports 100 percent of the world's population of Aleutian Canada Geese; 100 per cent of the Pacific Tule Geese; 66 percent of North America's Tundra Swans; and, 65 percent of North America's pintails.

The Central Valley is providing this nationally significant role in support of continental waterfowl populations with only a fraction of the historic wetlands, two thirds of which are privately owned, and dependent upon large acreages of rice and other grain crops that provide significant habitat value during the winter migration. The wetland, riparian, upland, and agricultural lands that provide habitat for waterfowl, also provide essential habitats for hundreds of other wetland dependent plant and animal species, supporting over 50 percent of California's threatened and endangered species during some stage of their life cycle. Accomplishments to date are quite remarkable, but that success is tenuous.

Projections for growth in the Central Valley approach 12 million new residents over the next 20 years, placing tremendous demands on natural resources. Demand for additional water supplies, improved flood control, housing, transportation, conversion of agricultural lands, and changes in crop selection will provide significant challenges to maintaining a healthy and diverse ecosystem.

In a recent survey conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California in collaboration with the Great Valley Center, 81 percent of respondents indicated support for, preserving wetlands, rivers, and environmentally sensitive areas. To capitalize on this support, as well as meeting the obligations established in various local, state, and federal laws, we must approach our opportunities for sustainable growth, economic vitality, and ecosystem restoration as interrelated and interdependent.

The Central Valley does not represent the full spectrum of ecosystem improvement opportunities that exist in California, yet it is illustrative of how dynamic and adaptable solutions must become. The Sacramento Valley drains to the south, while the San Joaquin drains to the north, both converging in the Delta where the waters combine before flowing to the San Francisco Bay. The natural hydrology of the Central Valley has been dramatically altered by water development. That water development has fueled economic growth of national significance. To maintain those benefits the investment in ecosystem improvement must be continued. However, the Central Valley is highly dependent upon the availability of managed water. As demand for water grows and historical uses are modified to meet emerging urban, agricultural, and environmental needs, great care must be taken to insure we do not unconsciously trade one ecosystem or economic improvement at the expense of another.

My experience, to date, indicates that the public in California has recognized the interrelated and interdependent relationship with a history of support for various propositions and initiatives that have directed billions of dollars into the protection and restoration of wildlife resources, while at the same time supporting investment in infrastructure to maintain and build economic vitality. The dynamics of support for both ecosystem health and economic growth has forged interest-based alliances that bring remarkable resources to focus on conflicts that have persisted for decades. Private landowners in California remain the backbone of wetland ownership providing stewardship to two-thirds of the remaining wetlands of the Central Valley. Through Ducks Unlimited, Inc. and other conservation organizations, millions of dollars are generated through grassroots fundraising, foundations, trusts, and grants to improve various habitats and invest in research.

Ducks Unlimited believes that wetland conservation in the west is a race against time and that the next 10 years will significantly determine if the North American Waterfowl Management Plan population objectives will become a reality. In recognition of this limited window of opportunity, Ducks Unlimited will be initiating major new fundraising efforts in support of the Pacific Northwest and California Central Valley/S. F. Bay.

California has great potential to improve ecosystems for a variety of reasons that include not only the diversity and resiliency of its natural resources, but also the history of diverse public/private partnerships. We believe precedent exists to show that improving ecosystems in complex environments such as California, are of national concern and can aid with resolution of similar problems elsewhere in the nation.

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