



The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership

Building Collaborative Action for Shorebird Conservation

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Mr. Jason Weller, Chief, NRCS
USDA, NRCS, Office of the Chief
1400 Independence Ave., SW, Room 5105-A
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Weller,

I am writing on behalf of the Council of the United States Shorebird Conservation Partnership to express deep appreciation for your support in recent years of wetland-dependent bird conservation efforts, especially in the Central Valley of California. The Central Valley is one of the most important sites in western North America during migration and winter for Pacific Flyway shorebird populations. As such, two sites within the Central Valley have been designated as sites of International Importance to the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network – the Sacramento Valley ricelands and wetlands and the Grasslands Ecological Area in the San Joaquin Valley.

Your national and California state teams worked diligently and cooperatively with industry partners, producers, academics, and conservation and science-based NGOs to develop an innovative program called the Waterbird Habitat Enhancement Program (WHEP). We commend your agency on the collaborative nature of this program and the significant investments you made over the past several years to conserve migratory birds in a region dominated by agriculture and facing precedent-setting drought conditions. Investment by NRCS in WHEP, which leverages individual farmer investments and privately-funded scientific expertise, has already resulted in great benefits to California's rice industry and increased habitat to support migratory birds in the Central Valley. Expansion of WHEP through the Bay Delta Initiative, and potentially through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, is essential to sustaining proven conservation practices in the rice-producing landscape and reaching a broader agricultural base (e.g., corn, wheat, and alfalfa producers).

NRCS's very recent support of emergency relief for migratory birds in this unprecedented drought year in California, by providing funds for producers to flood their fields during winter in the Sacramento Valley, is a testament to your agency's commitment to our public trust resources.

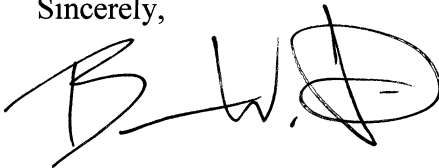
NRCS personnel from national, state, and field offices deserve high praise for rising to the challenge and providing the expertise, resources, and technical assistance to make these conservation programs a success for producers, communities, and migratory birds.

In addition to these great projects in California, NRCS has provided tremendous leadership and resources to restore wetland complexes in the Gulf Coast region over the last several years and has encouraged innovative partnerships in other wetland-rich landscapes such as the Rainwater Basin, Playa Lakes, and Prairie Potholes regions. Besides providing benefits for water quality and water conservation, these regions, along with the Central Valley of California, are critically important for providing adequate wetland habitat for migratory shorebirds, many that travel between Arctic breeding areas and South American wintering sites.

Again we extend a sincere thank-you for your active role in helping to meet shorebird conservation objectives. Throughout the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership network, we look forward to continued conservation opportunities with NRCS.

Please don't hesitate to contact Brad Andres (Brad_Andres@fws.gov) with any questions about the success or needs of these incredibly important programs to support migratory birds in the Central Valley of California and throughout the nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. W. Smith". The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive, with the first letters of each name being prominent.

Brian W. Smith, Chair

cc: Mr. Kirk Hanlin, Assistant Chief
Mr. Leonard Jordan, Associate Chief for Conservation
Mr. Carlos Suarez, California State Conservationist