

California's Vanishing Wetlands

88-126
UNDATED

... too little refuge habitat,
and too little fresh water for the habitat that
exists.

The consequences of everything—dams, levees, dredge and fill, population growth, the phenomenal rise of irrigated agriculture—are documented in a single, mournful paragraph of statistics:

In the 1840s, when the Gold Rush began, California had five million acres of permanent and seasonal wetlands. About 450,000 acres are left, and thousands more disappear every year. In the Central Valley, 6 percent of the original wetlands acreage remains. San Francisco Bay has lost 75 percent of its wetlands; the Klamath Basin, 60 percent; the Los Angeles Basin, 90 percent. Newport Bay once had 13,500 acres of mixed-water wetlands; 800 acres are left. Wilmington Bay once had 3,450 acres and now has six. No other state, not even New Jersey, has suffered such losses.

Considering all of this, it should come as no surprise that California's waterfowl population, after remaining fairly stable for the past twenty years, now seems to be entering a period of abject decline. Some game biologists believe that as many as 60 million waterfowl overwintered in the state before the Gold Rush. As recently as 1978, 6 million birds still came down. Last year, just over 2 million were counted.

The LAGUNA has:

235	species	of	BIRDS
20	"	"	MAMMALS
200	"	"	PLANTS
16	"	"	REPTILES
20	"	"	FISH