The Grasslands Ecological Area: 
A site of international importance for shorebirds

The Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership

Grasslands Water District Landowner Meeting
May 17, 2014
Central Valley’s importance to waterbirds

6,000,000 DUCKS
650,000 GEESE
350,000 SHOREBIRDS
Managed wetlands provide habitat for shorebirds

Shuford et al. 1998

% of Shorebirds

August: 20%
November: 43%
January: 33%
April: 65%

Other
Sewage ponds
Evaporation ponds
Agriculture
Managed Wetlands
The Grasslands - A critical area for shorebirds

14,000 in Fall

60,000 in Winter

200,000 in Spring

Point Blue Conservation Science
Shorebird annual cycle

- **Breeding**
  - Fall Migration: *July - October*
  - Spring Migration: *March - May*
- **Winter**: *November - February*
Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership

Shorebird Connectivity Project

Three Regions of Interest

1. **Upper Klamath Basin**
   - 85 Long-billed Dowitchers

2. **Sacramento Valley**
   - 39 Dowitchers
   - 68 Dunlin

3. **San Joaquin Basin**
   - 42 Dowitchers
   - 60 Dunlin

Birds tracked using aerial surveys Oct-April
Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership

Many shorebirds from northern regions move to Grasslands.
Migratory shorebirds in Grasslands are winter residents

25% of shorebirds moved to Grasslands in late February/March.
Grasslands is a regional refuge during fall and spring migration.

- **Fall Migration**: July - October
- **Spring Migration**: March - May
- **Breeding**: Throughout the year
- **Winter**: November - February

Before Sacramento Valley rice fields are winter-flooded, after winter-flooded rice fields are drained.
Shorebirds need shallow water and open areas
Managing for shorebirds during Fall Migration

• Seasonal Wetlands
  – Create vegetation-free areas in ponds and wetland benches
  – Maintain shallow water depths in some units between July -October

• Semi-permanent Wetlands
  – Delay drawdown at least one week
  – Stagger drawdown
Managing for shorebirds during Late winter/ Spring

• Up to 50% of all shorebirds use the Grasslands

  WHSRN, Shuford et al. 1998

• Seasonal Wetlands
  – Stagger, slow, or delay drawdowns
  – Drop water depths in some units

• Reverse-Cycle Wetlands
  – Disk before flooding
  – Stagger flood up
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