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STATE & FEDERAL ENTITIES, DUCKS UNLIMITED COLLABORATE TO PROTECT SUTTER COUNTY AG LAND

SACRAMENTO – State and federal government entities worked with Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU) and a local landowner to permanently set aside the Castro Ranch in Sutter County for agriculture. The 161-acre property, used for rice growing, is now enrolled in an agricultural conservation easement, meaning it can never be developed.

“This ranch is adjacent to the Sutter National Wildlife Refuge, which provides key wintering habitat for Pacific Flyway waterfowl,” said Virginia Getz, manager of Conservation Programs for DU. “However, it also lies between two areas of urban growth (Sacramento and Yuba City), and there has already been substantial conversion of agricultural lands to rural ranchettes in the area. Rice lands in the Sacramento Valley contribute substantially to meeting the nutritional needs of wintering waterfowl.”

Funding for the \$529,000 project was provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, the California Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP), and DU. Landowner Dave Castro also contributed in the form of a bargain sale. Wetlands America Trust, an affiliated organization of DU, will hold the easement.

“The Castro Ranch is a highly-productive, working rice farm that is located in close proximity to the Yuba City sphere of influence,” said Dean Kwasny, Easement Programs Specialist for NRCS. “The conservation easement will effectively reduce the risk of development, provide open space and habitat benefits to migratory birds, and protect the long-term agricultural viability of the land.”

The area between the eastern edge of the Sutter Bypass and Yuba City is agriculturally productive, known for its stable water supply and proximity to processing and shipping facilities. As such, organizations concerned with protecting California’s important agricultural land have worked to ensure its stability by limiting development potential in the area.

“We thought this was an important project because there are several other agricultural conservation easements along the eastern side of the Sutter Bypass, and we’re helping to create a block of protected

farmland,” said John Lowrie, head of the Department of Conservation’s Division of Land Resource Protection. “We’re very interested in helping to protect the productive farmlands of Sutter County and to help maintain a viable agricultural economy in the region.”

The easements form a buffer zone that benefits the entire ecosystem of the Sutter National Wildlife Refuge. The properties provide key migratory waterfowl habitat, as well as habitat for such wildlife as the giant garter snake, the red-winged blackbird, great blue heron, and the Swainson’s Hawk.

About the Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy Program: Begun in 1996, the CFCP has provided more than \$83 million in funding to permanently shield more than 57,000 acres of the state’s best agricultural land from development. For more information, visit: www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp.

About the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program: The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program provides matching funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farm and rangeland in agricultural uses. Working through existing programs, USDA partners with state, tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners. USDA provides up to 50 percent of the fair market easement value of the conservation easement. Visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/easements/farmranch/> for more information.

About Wetlands America Trust: The trust was created more than 25 years ago is to provide specialized financial and philanthropic support to Ducks Unlimited, Inc. The trust’s principle role is the fiduciary responsibility for DU's endowment and land holdings. The trust is also one of the nation's largest accredited land trusts, holding conservation easements on close to 400,000 acres. Learn more at <http://www.ducks.org/philanthropy/wetlands-america-trust>.