

Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes – An Environmental NGO Perspective

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The Central Valley of California once supported millions of acres of wetlands and riverine habitats with a diversity of wildlife populations including the largest inland run of anadromous salmon in North America, bears, mountain lions, condor, elk and global migrations of arctic and Neo-tropical bird assemblages. The Central Valley also supported populations of Native Americans exceeding hundreds of thousands who managed the landscape with fire and water diversions to provide a rich and abundant lifestyle reliant upon the valley's functional ecology. We have lost 95% of this native ecology since 1850. The rapid and dramatic conversion of this landscape to the world's most productive agricultural economy has resulted in many layers of government commitments and agency oversight in the recovery of endangered species and promotion of cultural preservation that must be balanced with the needs of our existing and dynamic communities, farms and industries. Today, more than 27 million Californians rely on this watershed. Climate projections show increasing intensity of water scarcity. All investments in ecosystem recovery and river flow management require deep and respectful consideration of many interests, often with limited data and great uncertainty.

River Partners' habitat restoration work has demonstrated the value of large-scale nature-based solutions for river management and built cross-sector partnerships for healthy rivers and landscapes and communities in the Central Valley. This talk will share perspectives and lessons learned in navigating the translation of habitat and environmental targets from academic and public sectors into on-the-ground habitat restoration and river management changes that provide multiple benefits to communities such as reduced flood risk, improved water supply management, and increased access to the outdoors – all critical components of recovery of the ecology of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers. Historic agreements in negotiation today will build on this foundation of adaptation, inclusion, and bold action.

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