



**TULARE BASIN WILDLIFE PARTNERS**  
Creating Opportunities for Nature and People

# May 2010 Project Update



Restored Tulare Basin wetland. Johanna Kamansky ©2010

## Celebrating Wetland Restoration in the Tulare Basin

On April 30, 2010, Tulare Basin Wildlife Partners (TBWP) convened members of the Tulare Lake Basin Working Group for a progress celebration at the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Atwell Island Project, just south of Alpaugh, CA. They had much to celebrate - a piece of important wetland habitat had been restored to natural conditions not found in this part of the Tulare Basin for 150 years.

**Exploration & Change** In spring 1850, the Army Corps of Engineers dispatched Lt. George Derby, a topographer, to explore the Tulare Basin. The expedition worked its way east on a narrow ridge of sand between the large, deep Tulare Lake to the north and a shallow wetland of dense tules to the south. In the vicinity of the present day town of Alpaugh, they come to a halt near a Yokuts village and could go no farther on foot due to water and tules. On Derby's maps he wrote the name 'Tache' for Tulare Lake and 'Ton Tache' for the shallow wetlands. Gradually this vast shallow wetland, which covered more than 24 square miles, dried up as canals diverted water for agricultural uses and wetlands changed to farm fields.

**New Land Management Efforts** In the 1990s, the Natural Resources Conservation Service started to restore wetlands in the Tulare Basin. In 2005, they purchased an easement from a local farmer to establish a 300-acre wetland on this now 630-acre site. Before construction of the wetland began, the farmer decided he didn't want to manage a wetland and donated the land and wetland easement to the BLM.

**Birth of a Wetland** In February 2009, after several years of planning, the BLM began earth moving to create a five-cell managed wetland, and three months later, finished constructing the levees and ponds. The first of what would become three AmeriCorps NCCC crews immediately started planting willows, cottonwoods and mulefat, as well as transplanting tule clumps. A second crew continued this restoration work

during late fall, and in 2010, a third crew constructed the viewing platform where future visitors can bird watch, take pictures, and learn about the importance of wetland habitats.

**A Key Role** TBWP played an instrumental role in moving this important wetland restoration project forward towards completion. The organization applied for and received a grant from the Bureau of Reclamation to fund and augment project infrastructure, including a lift pump, water delivery canal and pipeline, and an access road to enable future visitors to experience the wetlands. Additional partners included the US Fish and Wildlife Service, whose maintenance staff oversaw the work of the AmeriCorps crews.

**The Big Picture** This restoration and public access project is only a portion of a larger restoration effort spanning 8,000 acres of upland and wetland habitat managed by the Bureau of Land Management in the Tulare Basin. The Atwell Island Project serves as a model for other Tulare Basin land and water projects that benefit the local community, and soon will be open for public enjoyment.



BLM staff, Karl Kraft and Steve Laymon, cut the ribbon across the wetland viewing platform at the April 30 celebration event. Johanna Kamansky ©2010