

California Department of Water Resources



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CONTACTS:

- [David Mraz](#), DWR, Chief, Delta Levees Program, Central District- (916) 651-7017
- Robert Orcutt, DFG Region 2, Program Manager, Delta Levee Habitat Improvement - (916) 358-2924
- [Bob Yeadon](#), DWR, Senior Engineer, Central District- (916) 651-7012
- [Donald Strickland](#), DWR, Public Information Officer - (916) 657-4469

DECKER ISLAND HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

SOLANO COUNTY - Fifteen acres of valuable Delta wetlands habitat will be created by the Department of Water Resources and the Department of Fish & Game when the area is opened to the Sacramento River on October 29 at 10:00 a.m.

The flooding will occur on a portion of Decker Island in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta that was purposely excavated and shaped to form habitat for threatened and endangered species. This opening is a necessary part of the Decker Island Habitat Enhancement Project and is being done in conjunction with the CALFED Program.

Decker Island is a 470-acre tract surrounded by the Sacramento River to the northwest and Horseshoe Bend (a former meander of the Sacramento River) to the east, south and west. The 15-acre project site is contained within 33.2 acres owned by DFG on the northern tip of the island.

The Decker Island Habitat Enhancement Project provides a unique opportunity to couple levee rehabilitation with habitat improvement and involves two components: the removal of overburden spoils from Decker Island for levee reinforcement at Webb Tract and Twitchell Island and the restoration of the borrow site at Decker Island through recontouring to create suitable conditions for wetland and riparian habitat development.

Project goals are as follows:

creation of native habitat found in the Delta region, including meandering channels, open water, riverine aquatic bed, emergent tidal marsh, shaded riverine aquatic, and riparian habitats;

- creation of habitat important to sustain many species of wildlife native to the Delta;
- development of a site that has continuity and connection to fluvial processes of the Delta;
- the creation of self-sustaining habitats that need little human intervention;
- improvement of water quality;
- development of recreation with respect to the natural heritage environment to the Delta; and
- opportunity to employ principals of adaptive management in which lessons learned in the earlier phases of the project will be incorporated into the later phases.

Pre-project site elevations varied from 20 to 23 feet due to placement of dredge material between 1917 and 1937 (excluding shoreline elevation). This high plateau was vegetated primarily with star thistle, fennel and other non-native plants.

The grading plan was designed to create a variety of hydrologic conditions that will support diverse habitats. The site was recontoured after preliminary excavation and grading. Contouring created slough-like features, including contiguous openings to the Delta at Horseshoe Bend.

Completed site elevations vary between -6 to 15 feet with 11.1 acres of habitat composed of the following:

- Open Shallow Water - 2.37 acres
- Emergent Marsh - 3.32 acres
- Riparian Woodland and Upland Scrub - 1.56 acres
- Riparian Scrub and Mixed Riparian - 3.85 acres

To encourage the development of diverse vegetative communities, the site was planted with wetland rushes, shrubs, and trees. Along drier slopes, grasses were seeded to control erosion and provide upland habitat. Large tree root structures -also commonly called "rootwads"- were aligned along the riverbank to protect the young plantings, minimize erosion, and enhance fish habitat. While success criteria are being developed and will consist of percent cover of the desired species, mortality and overlapping of habitat types is a natural part of succession and will not be discouraged. Collectively, these efforts will lead to a long term wetland ecosystem with considerable wildlife, water quality, and aesthetic benefits.

To get to Decker Island, drive south on Highway 99, west on Highway 12, then south on Highway 160 at Rio Vista. Proceed to the Three Mile Slough Bridge and make an immediate left into the surf shop parking lot. Boat rides to the island will be arranged by DWR staff beginning at 9:15.

B-roll footage of the habitat enhancement construction work will be available at Decker Island on Monday.

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The Department of Water Resources operates and maintains the State Water Project, provides dam safety and flood control and inspection services, assists local water districts in water management and water conservation planning, and plans for future statewide water needs.

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