



Case Study

A FORMAL COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT PROVIDES THE STRUCTURE FOR CONTINUED GROWTH COSUMNES RIVER, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

A venerable coalition learns to re-examine and adapt its vision to address new conservation challenges.

The Cosumnes River is one of the last undammed rivers in the state of California. The flooded fields and thick riparian forest created by the river are key habitat for migratory birds. The water flows are still natural enough to support the most perseverant of California's dwindling salmon. Conservation work at the Cosumnes River Preserve is expanding even though it lies in the heart of California's multi-billion dollar agricultural industry. Its success is due to many things, including a practical, highly formal document, the Cooperative Management Agreement (CMA) that guides the actions of several private and public partners involved with the Preserve.

Today the Preserve consists of approximately 60 properties adding up to 45,859 acres of wildlife habitat and agricultural land owned by seven land-owning partners, including The Nature Conservancy, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), California Department of Fish & Game (DFG), Sacramento County, Department of Water Resources (DWR), Ducks Unlimited, and the California State Lands Commission.

In the mid-1980's, a coalition of public and private groups, including most of those listed above, came together to protect the Cosumnes. All were interested in working with TNC to expand its original "pocket preserve" to include a mosaic of managed riparian areas, wetlands, native grasslands, restored forests and compatible agriculture demonstrations. The entities easily developed a working relationship as they each approached the collaboration with the same overarching goals and values: protecting the Cosumnes River from its headwaters in the El Dorado National Forest to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta; increasing habitat and conservation-friendly agriculture for migratory waterfowl and other native species; and allowing public access.

The partnership worked for many years; each organization brought specific strengths to the endeavor that enabled them to tackle complex problems related to the management of the area. New lands were acquired, a visitor center was built, programs to expose 10,000 local school children a year were developed, thousands of native trees were planted, and migratory bird habitat was improved.

As time went on, more entities became involved, and the group felt that the project would benefit from a more formal agreement. Many of the entities were part of large public agencies, which made clarity of operation even more important. A Cooperative Management Agreement (CMA) was first

entered into in April 1994. It was amended on August 15, 1996, to include additional partners as signatories to the agreement.

The CMA defines the goals, roles, and responsibilities of the partners for managing and administering all portions of lands currently owned by the Partners in the vicinity of the lower Cosumnes River in Sacramento and San Joaquin Counties. The primary goal of the CMA is cooperative management of the Preserve as a single ecological unit for the protection, restoration, and maintenance of the quality and diversity of two rare communities in California—the valley oak riparian forest and the freshwater seasonal wetlands—and their associated wildlife habitat values.

Today, the BLM, DFG, Ducks Unlimited, the Sacramento County Regional Parks, The Nature Conservancy, and the DWR are signatory partners to the agreement. The California State Lands Commission is a land-owning partner at the Preserve, and the Wildlife Conservation Board and Natural Resources Conservation Service hold conservation interests but are not signatories to the CMA and so use other avenues of communication. All of the partners recognize that their respective interests in those lands are subject to different authorities and policies, but that the CMA is intended by the partners to define an administrative process and facilitate cooperation among them to the greatest extent possible.

In 2008 the partners produced a Cosumnes River Management Plan, created through a lengthy and comprehensive stakeholder process facilitated by a consultant. This document has set the stage for a new chapter of powerful conservation work on behalf of the Cosumnes River. It contains a total of eight chapters that describe how the Preserve will be managed over the next 10 years with richly detailed maps and comprehensive text. The most important result of the planning effort was reaching consensus among the participating partners on a long-term vision for the Preserve. The Preserve's Vision Statement is as follows:

The Cosumnes River Preserve Partners envision the permanent protection of a continuous riparian corridor extending from the Cosumnes headwaters to the Delta, including adjacent floodplain and wetland habitats, and a vast vernal pool grassland complex supporting endangered species. The Partners will utilize stewardship and compatible ranching and farming activities as methods to sustain native plant and wildlife communities and the processes that perpetuate a dynamic mosaic of habitats. We will provide opportunities for people of all ages to appreciate the flora and fauna of the Cosumnes River Preserve and to experience being part of a natural landscape.

By continuing to test and reinvigorate itself in highly formal ways, the Cosumnes River Preserve partnership continues to grow and thrive.

For more information about the Cosumnes River Management Plan, visit http://www.cosumnes.org/about_crp/CH%201%20-%202.pdf