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**RICE FIELDS CRITICAL IN SUPPORTING BIRD POPULATIONS
AND HABITAT IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY**
**Central Valley Joint Partnership Implementation Plan released today points to the
benefits of rice fields for wildlife**

(SACRAMENTO, CA) – Today, the Central Valley Joint Venture is releasing its 2006 Implementation Plan which will direct the partnership’s efforts for sustaining and expanding bird populations and habitat across the Central Valley. One of the key outcomes points to the critical role of rice fields in providing the necessary nutritional needs for waterfowl in a region that has lost 95 percent of its natural wetland habitats.

The Plan features conservation objectives for a variety of bird populations, and evaluates the habitat and water needs required to sustain these habitat conditions throughout the 10 million acres of the Central Valley.

“This Plan quantifies the diverse benefits of rice fields beyond traditional agricultural purposes,” commented Paul Buttner of the California Rice Commission. “California rice is one of the few crops that benefits wildlife and contributes to the protection of air and water quality. Over half of the nutritional needs of waterfowl in the Sacramento Valley are being met by rice.”

Rice acres are a critical factor in meeting the nutritional requirements of wintering waterfowl in the Sacramento Valley. If rice acres went away today, over 175,000 acres of land would have to be acquired and restored into wetlands to support the same wintering waterfowl populations currently supported by rice fields. This effort would initially cost over \$600 million and would continue to incur \$20 million in annual maintenance on these newly created wetlands. This is a substantial public resource benefit that comes essentially free to the public because of a viable California rice industry.

Wetlands are living ecosystems, providing improved water quality, floodwater storage, open space and wildlife habitat. Compared to the 4 million acres of wetland that spanned the Valley in the 1800s, only 205,000 managed wetland acres remain. Winter-flooded rice fields provide approximately 350,000 acres of valuable wetland habitat for wintering waterfowl and other species. In addition, the 500,000 acres of rice flooded



during each growing season are used by a variety of wetland-dependant species along the Pacific Flyway.

The California rice industry is based in the Sacramento Valley. Each year, California rice producers plant and harvest over 500,000 acres of rice, contributing a half-billion dollars to the economy and providing habitat and fodder for 235 species of wildlife along the Pacific Flyway. The California Rice Commission represents the 2,500 growers and handlers who farm and process rice in the state annually.

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