

## River Partners Honors Butte County District Attorney & State Parks

### Conservation Leadership Awards Given at Big Room Celebration

**O**n Friday, April 16, 2010, River Partners bestowed its Conservation Leadership Award to two local officials during its 12<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in the Big

Room. Butte County District Attorney, Michael Ramsey, and retired State Parks District Superintendent, Robert Foster, accepted their awards from River Partners' Board Chair, Irving Schiffman.

The goal of the Conservation Leadership Award was to distinguish the professional efforts of Mr. Ramsey and Mr. Foster to preserve, strengthen and protect our region's natural resources.

"Mr. Ramsey has prosecuted many environmental pollution cases and in doing so has protected the quality of the Sacramento and Feather Rivers and other waterways and groundwater in Butte County. During his tenure as the chair of the California District Attorneys Association Environmental Protection Committee, Mr. Ramsey was recognized for distinguished achievements in environmental law and policy by the American Bar Association. River Partners is pleased to add to that recognition of Mr.



River Partners COO Tad Alexander (far left) and Board Chairman Irv Schiffman (far right) honor Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey at the Sierra Nevada Big Room.

*Continued on page 8.*

The Sundial Bridge over the Sacramento River in Redding, CA. Photo by Emm Gunn, iStockPhoto.com.

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Coyote pups seen at the La Burrenca Unit of the SRNWR, a site restored by River Partners. Photo by Michael Rogner, Restoration Biologist.

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# Message from the Board Chair

By Irv Schiffman

## River Partners and the Local Economy

At River Partners' Annual Dinner in April, our Chief Financial Officer, Jessica Bourne, gave a well-received PowerPoint presentation explaining the contributions that River Partners makes to the local and regional economy. We know that many effective and well-managed non-profits contribute greatly to the overall quality of life in their community, but it is, perhaps, less well known that they also contribute to the community's economic well-being.

Since its establishment some 12 years ago, River Partners has received over \$45,000,000 in grants and contracts from a diverse body of governmental and private sources and presently has an annual budget of about \$5,000,000 a year. During this time we have completed over one hundred projects, restored more than 6,400 acres and put more than 1,000,000 plants in the ground. Virtually all of the money used in completing these projects is spent locally for salaries, purchases, and rents.

Riparian restoration is a multi-faceted scientific, engineering and agricultural-like endeavor that generally requires the hiring of mapping consultants, irrigation specialists, hydraulic analysts, and hydroseeding contractors. The fieldwork we perform is, of course, labor intensive, and over the years we have hired hundreds of workers for clearing and planting activity.

The jobs created by River Partners have a multiplier effect that also contributes to the local economy. An employment multiplier study by the University of Massachusetts looking at the direct effects (jobs created) and induced effects (worker consumption) of restoration activity concludes that approximately 40 jobs are generated for every \$1,000,000 spent.

Beyond employment, our grant and contract funds are used to purchase thousands of plants from local and regional nurseries and we estimate that over our lifetime we have spent more than \$1,000,000 in local purchases of tractors, gators, equipment carriers, and vehicles. In addition, we make use of local banking, legal, and accounting services. We purchased our Chico office building some six years ago and rent office space in the City of Modesto.

Donations by River Partners members also help bring additional funds into our community by allowing us to undertake the time and research necessary to identify opportunities and then to leverage the relatively small amount of private dollars into significantly sized habitat purchases and restoration projects.

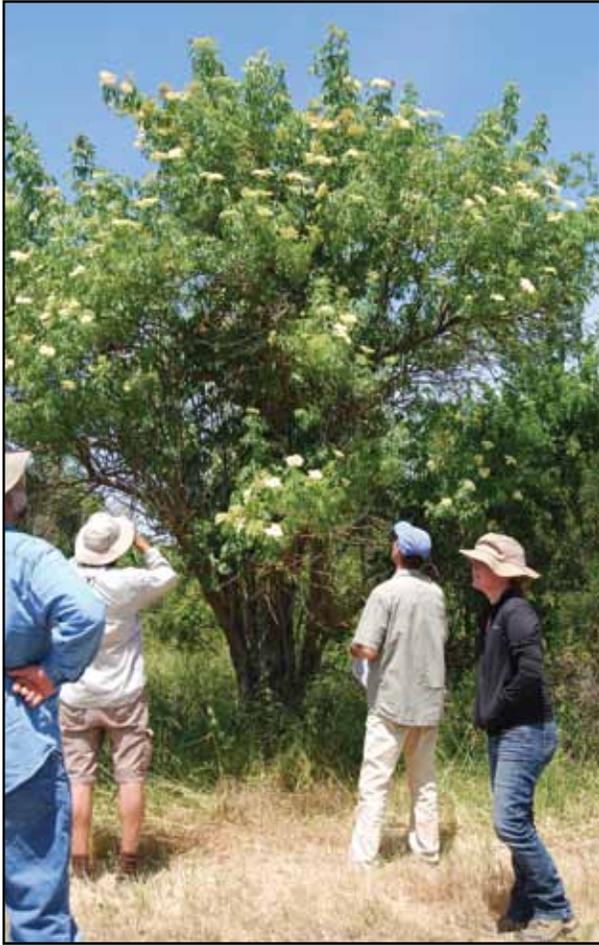
In sum, in its efforts to carry out its mission of creating "wildlife habitat for the benefit of people and the environment," River Partners has been able to create green jobs in both the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys and contribute in other ways to the growing of their local economies.



JOURNAL printed on recycled paper.

# Project Updates

## River Partners Visits with Pollinator Expert



In an effort to improve restoration designs, River Partners' Ecology staff invited Dr. Neal Williams, a UC Davis pollinator expert, to talk about his work on the ecological and economic importance of native bees within the context of restored natural habitat. After hearing about Dr. Williams' recent research, River Partners hosted him at several restoration sites to talk about how to enhance pollinator success and monitor for pollinator usage.

*A flowering native elderberry shrub, as pictured, is a food source for native bees as well as the host plant of the threatened valley elderberry longhorn beetle. Photo by River Partners staff.*

## Breaking Ground in Placer County

In May 2010, River Partners broke ground in Placer County along Coon Creek, implementing comprehensive riparian restoration of 28.82 acres on private lands. Funded through Ducks Unlimited, this work is part of the American Basin Working Landscapes Project—a collaborative effort to integrate habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement for special-status species on working agricultural lands in the American Basin. When completed, this restoration project will benefit federally listed species. It will allow flood flow conveyance along this stretch of Coon Creek. Lastly, it will maintain excellent pasturage for cattle grazing operations.

## Sacramento River Paddling Trip on July 31, 2010

For more information visit our website: [www.RiverPartners.org](http://www.RiverPartners.org). All trips are posted there and on our Facebook page. To receive first hand news about upcoming trips, register your email address on our home page.

## Earth Day Celebration with Hamilton Union HS and State Parks

On Wednesday, April 21, River Partners and State Parks hosted students from Hamilton Union High School's Introduction to Agriculture Class at the Irvine Finch Boat Launch, part of the Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park. The students installed native plants and trees on a parcel near the entrance to the parking lot, helping to improve an important public access site along the Sacramento River.



Ms. Lohse's Introduction to Agriculture Class, HUHS, at Irvine Finch Boat Launch, California State Parks.

### Results Are In: *Endangered Rabbits are Living in our Planted Habitats!*

By Julie Rentner, Restoration Ecologist

with assistance from Matt Lloyd, Coordinator, Riparian Brush Rabbit Project, Endangered Species Recovery Program

Since 2002, River Partners has collaborated with the US Fish & Wildlife Service and CSU Stanislaus' Endangered Species Recovery Program (ESRP) to design and plant habitat that could sustain the endangered riparian brush rabbit, especially those bred in captivity and released back into the "wild."

The species census recently conducted by ESRP scientists on re-vegetated levees and "bunny mounds" within the San Joaquin River NWR seem to indicate that the endangered rabbits are using River Partners' plantings. With this good news and the continuing efforts of the ESRP, many are hopeful that the riparian brush

rabbit will eventually join the ranks of the Aleutian cackling goose as a "Fully Recovered Species," and the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex (which includes the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge) will have another success to add to its already impressive species recovery record.

Since the 1990s, the Endangered Species Recovery Program (ESRP) – a group of scientists specializing in the assessment and recovery of endangered species of the San Joaquin Valley – have managed recovery efforts for the Federal

and State endangered riparian brush rabbit. In response to the extinction scare of 1997, ESRP staff partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, US Bureau of Reclamation, and California

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Matt Lloyd, the Riparian Brush Rabbit Project Coordinator for ESRP, manages the trapping effort to describe rabbit populations at the Refuge. Here, Matt is preparing to collect information about a captured riparian brush rabbit on Chrisman Island.



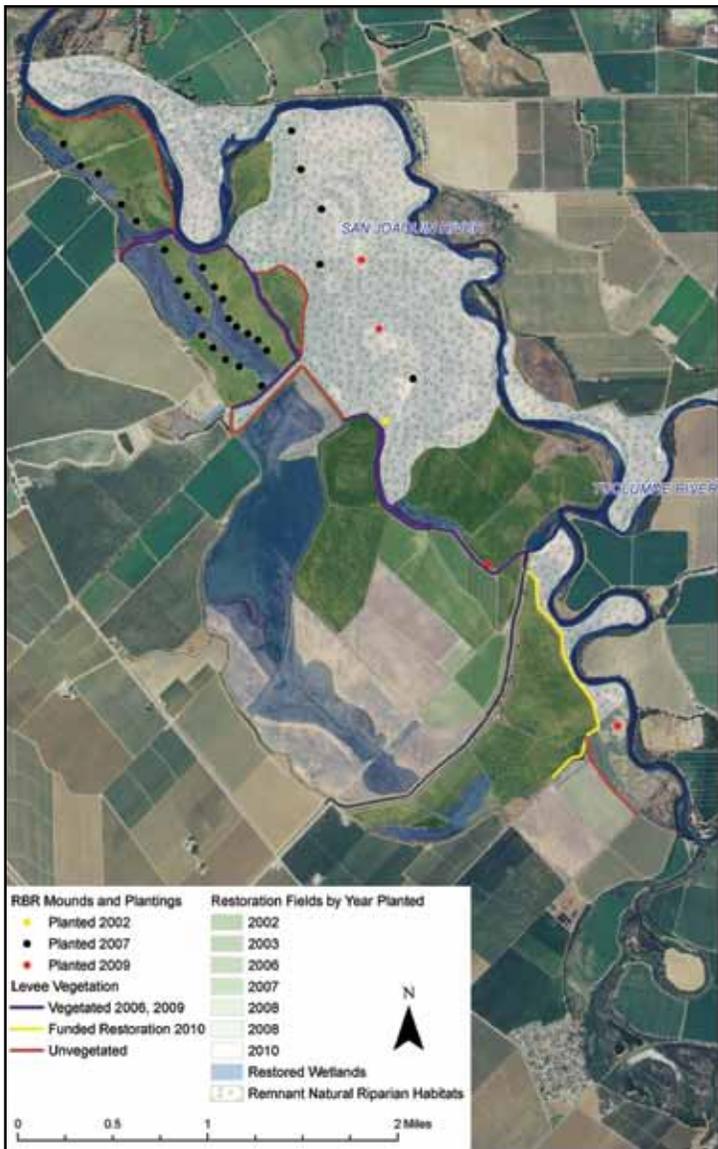
A vegetated levee on the Vierra Unit of the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge provides dense shrub cover which allows riparian brush rabbits to travel between restored fields and remnant riparian habitat, facilitating genetic exchange and migration across the 3,000 acre floodplain preserve.

Department of Water Resources to form a Riparian Mammal Technical Group (RMTG) to promote drastic measures to protect these last remaining representatives of a dying breed.

With a captive breeding program producing hundreds of healthy baby bunnies (more than 1,000 have been released to date), the ESRP needed additional suitable habitat in the region to release the rabbits. Much of the dense shrub thicket habitat that the rabbits require had been lost to clearing for farming or grazing and for flood conveyance concerns. Even in conservation areas that had not been cleared, the physical processes of regular flooding and occasional bank and floodplain scour had been eliminated by the large water projects in the region. River Partners was called onto the project to develop habitat restoration strategies that targeted brush rabbit habitat in spite of the lack of river physical processes required to establish it naturally.

River Partners brainstormed with the RMTG about cost-effective ways to create new high ground areas for bunnies. Historic floodplain habitat features such as seasonal wetland basins and oxbow lakes at the Refuge had been leveled to facilitate farming. Clearly, restoring the





This map of riparian habitat restoration on the West Unit of the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge was created by River Partners in May 2010 from a basemap by the National Agriculture Aerial Imagery Program (NAIP 2009). Vegetated levees (purple) provide riparian brush rabbit migration routes between remnant and restored areas. Unvegetated levees will be targeted for restoration in the coming years. Basemap provided by USGS.

restored areas and to other high-elevation portions of the Refuge. These results suggest that rabbits and other terrestrial species will use vegetated levees to evade rising floodwaters as well as to repopulate drying floodplain areas following the next “big one.” This will increase population resilience and genetic mixing of brush rabbit populations across the Refuge, ensuring the long-term viability of the species.

Other species observed on the levees during the live trapping efforts include: desert cottontail, California vole, deer mouse, black rat, striped skunk, and opossum. A few long-tailed weasels were trapped on the constructed mounds in the Vierra Unit. Weasels are thought to be a problematic predator of riparian brush rabbits, and a new challenge will be researching interactions between vegetation and weasels to find strategies to discourage weasel populations while enhancing rabbit populations in future restoration efforts.

River Partners continues to raise funds for levee revegetation. In 2010, under a generous grant from the Bureau of Reclamation’s Central Valley Project Habitat Restoration Program and Conservation Program, we will begin work on both sides of a 1.8 mile stretch of levee in the Lara Unit of the Refuge. This expansion of the project presents a great opportunity to facilitate rabbit repopulation of restored areas to the south. Levees on the east side of the San

Joaquin River and Dos Rios Ranch will be targeted in the coming years to provide multi-directional evacuation and migration routes. Coordinated levee breaching and floodplain wetland inundation projects

in this area will work cooperatively with rabbit recovery efforts to ensure the drastic extinction scares are a thing of the past.

reaching near 100 percent cover after just two to three growing seasons.

In February and March of 2010, ESRP scientists performed “standardized” live trapping on River Partners’ vegetated levees and mounds to assess for the first time the extent these “refugia” were being used by the rabbits. Of those trapped, over 60% were Refuge-born indicating the natural population

is taking off. This year’s preliminary census data for riparian brush rabbits in natural habitats at the Refuge are also the highest than ever recorded (NB: ESRP began the rabbit surveys in 2005).

More rabbits were trapped on vegetated levees adjacent to remnant habitat (and original release sites) than at distances away from remnant habitat, but the trap results on the levees show that the dense vegetation in a linear arrangement on the levees is providing rabbit “highways” across the Refuge, possibly facilitating dispersal into other

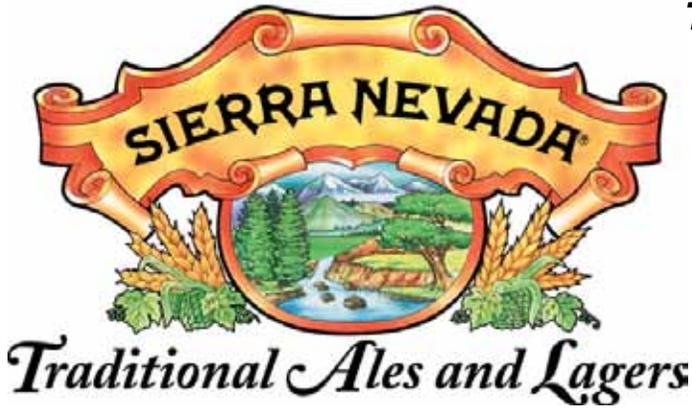
**These results suggest that rabbits and other terrestrial species will use vegetated levees to evade rising floodwaters as well as to repopulate drying floodplain areas following the next “big one.”**

topography of these natural features for the benefit of waterfowl would create a brush rabbit opportunity. Spoils from wetland excavation were piled high enough to stand out of the flood depths, creating high-elevation flood refuge for rabbits. We went to work planning and fundraising for projects that construct and vegetate these and other high-ground areas of the Refuge (levees and fields) using drip irrigation and hand labor – the plantings would be too dense to allow for mechanized vegetation management.

A shrub community of dense rose and blackberry was planted on the sides of elevated mounds, while the top was vegetated with rose, blackberry, elderberry, coyote brush, mulefat and golden currant. The vegetation grew wildly, with shrubs

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## River Partners Celebrates 12<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



(left) Guests bidding on silent auction items. (right) Guests from Matson & Isom Technology enjoying their silent auction dessert prize. (below) Bill Fishkin, Master of Ceremonies.

River Partners, its members, supporters, friends, and partners celebrated the organization's 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary on April 16, 2010, in the Big Room at the Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. More than 200 people attended the annual gala and were treated to a silent auction, dinner, opportunity drawings, and great music from Latin jazz group, *Los Papi Chulos*. See our list of sponsors and supporters on these pages and view more photos at [RiverPartners.org](http://RiverPartners.org).



### Become a River Partner or Make a Special Gift

Join us in our mission to create wildlife habitat for the benefit of people and the environment. Your contribution will support our work to restore and protect the rivers of California. You will receive our quarterly *Journal*, a River Partners membership decal, and invitations to special tours and events.

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## River Partners Honors Butte County District Attorney & State Parks

*Continued from page 1.*

Ramsey's service to the environment by granting our Conservation Leadership Award," said Schiffman during the ceremony.

"Mr. Foster has served more than 32 years of service with California State Parks, most recently as the Superintendent of the Northern Buttes District, overseeing 10 northern California counties. It is important for River Partners to turn over the properties we purchase and restore to an agency that will manage them wisely. Mr. Foster helped facilitate State Park's acceptance of River Partner's two properties on the Sacramento River: Gianella Landing, which is now part of Irvine Finch Boat Launch, and the Gaines property, which is on the west site of the Butte City Bridge. These donations served to increase recreation access to the Sacramento River in these critical areas," added Schiffman.

Both awardees accepted this honor before a crowd of 200 community members, who were helping River Partners celebrate its 12 years of river land restoration work throughout California.



River Partners COO Tad Alexander (far left) and Board Chairman Irv Schiffman (far right) thank State Parks District Superintendent Robert Foster (center) at the Sierra Nevada Big Room.