

AGENDA ITEM 7: Nutria in the Delta

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Requested Action: Receive report on Nutria in the Delta

Background: The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) coordinates with other government agencies and non-governmental organizations to reduce the harmful effects of non-native invasive species on the waterways and wildlands of California. The Invasive Species Program within the Habitat Conservation Planning Branch of CDFW works to prevent the introduction of invasive species into the state, detect and respond to introductions, and prevent the spread of invasive species that have become established.

Nutria are large, semi-aquatic rodents native to South America that are considered one of the world’s worst invasive species. They were introduced to the U.S. for the fur trade in 1899 and were present in the Central Valley and South Coast of California in the 1940s-1950s but were eradicated from the state in the 1970s. Nutria reach up to 2.5 feet in body length and weigh over 20 pounds. They strongly resemble native beaver and muskrat, except that they have white whiskers and round tails. They can reach sexual maturity as early as four months of age and breed year-round. Nutria have devastating impacts on wetland habitats, agriculture, and water conveyance/flood protection infrastructure. Nutria burrow into banks and levees and can consume up to 25% of their body weight in above- and below-ground plant material daily. Nutria have been confirmed sighted in the Delta.

New Invasion and Response in California

Nutria are classified as a California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) A-rated pest and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) [detrimental] restricted animal (14 CCR § 671). In March 2017, a pregnant nutria was captured in a wetland southeast of Gustine, Merced County. From March 2017 through March 2018, more than 50 nutria have been captured or confirmed in Merced, Stanislaus, Fresno, Tuolumne, Mariposa, and San Joaquin counties in canals, rivers, and wetlands, on public and private property (see attached maps).

An Interagency Nutria Response Team has been formed including CDFW, the California Departments of Food and Agriculture, Parks and Recreation, and Water Resources, as well as federal agency counterparts and local agricultural commissioner offices. An eradication plan is being developed, modeled after the successful Chesapeake Bay Nutria Eradication Project. The

first priority is to determine the extent of the invasion and the size of the population. Recent nutria occurrences in the Delta include:

- 1) Nutria taken on 4/13/18 – a dog dragged an animal carcass to landowner's home approximately 0.1 mi off Old River and 1.25 linear miles (2.4 river miles) from the confluence with the San Joaquin River. Property owners identified the animal as nutria and on 4/16/18 delivered the carcass to the San Joaquin County Agricultural Commissioner, who contacted CDFW. Veterinarians performed a necropsy and determined this animal was a male, approximately six months of age, and sexually mature. There was no conclusive cause of death, however it had extensive trauma consistent with a predator attack.
- 2) Nutria captured by Lathrop Animal Services on 4/9/18 (reported to CDFW on 4/20/18), was netted under a vehicle in a residential neighborhood 0.5 mi off the San Joaquin River. Animal Services did not identify the animal but photographed it, and released it back to the San Joaquin River on 4/9/18. The sex and approximate age of this animal is unknown.

Our presenters will provide additional details and describe the eradication strategy for this threat to Delta resources.



