Take Me Out to the Delta

America’s National Pastime in the Heart of California

The creation of baseball is a complicated subject. According to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, various versions of the game have been played on American soil since the 1700s. Initially based on the games of cricket and rounders from the British Isles, every town and community in America had its own rules and traditions. Eventually, the style of play established in New York gradually began to win out over the versions played in other places. Unique to the New York version was a foul territory and the rule that players had to stick to the base paths when running.

As settlers, gold miners, and others arrived in California from the east during the 1800s, baseball came too and quickly became a popular pastime in the state’s small towns. This was especially true in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, where communities along the rivers organized games in open fields long before community parks or stadiums were established. Continued page 2.
Some of the earliest teams in the west originated in the Delta region. A baseball team from Stockton won the California Independent League championship in 1888, the same year a reporter from San Francisco named Ernest Thayer penned a now-famous poem called “Casey at the Bat.” It’s believed the Stockton team was the inspiration for the team in Thayer’s poem, the Mudville Nine. Mudville is a purported nickname for Stockton.

True professional baseball in the region came with the creation of the Pacific Coast League (PCL) in 1903. The original PCL charter included the San Francisco Seals, the Oakland Oaks, the Seattle Indians, the Portland Beavers, the Los Angeles Angels, and the Sacramento Senators. While Sacramento is the only city of the original charter cities to still have a minor league team, its team experienced various moves and name changes throughout its history, including the name Sacramento Solons. While Sacramento lost the Solons in the 1970s, the Sacramento Rivercats moved to West Sacramento from Vancouver, British Columbia in 2000.

Today, the Stockton Ports and the Sacramento Rivercats continue to offer baseball in the Delta. The Rivercats are the Triple-A affiliate of the San Francisco Giants and play in West Sacramento at Sutter Health Park along the Sacramento River. The Stockton Ports are a Single-A affiliate of the Oakland A’s and play at Banner Island Ballpark on the waterfront in downtown Stockton. We can’t think of two better places to be during warm summer evenings in the Delta, enjoying America’s pastime.
California’s Playground

An Update on Recreation and Tourism in the Delta

The Delta gives visitors a place to slow down and relax, to taste earth’s bounty, and to leave the urban areas behind. It is called California’s boating paradise and is one of the State’s most important fishing and waterfowl hunting resources, a place with natural habitats for bird watching and nature study, and a scenic place to meander and explore by boat or car. The Delta is a wonderfully diverse recreation resource, attracting a wide variety of users. It is unique in that the great majority visit privately owned establishments such as marinas, wineries, or restaurants, but largely recreate on public waterways. Recreation is integral to the Delta, complementing its multiple resources and contributing to the economic vitality of the region. Residents and visitors recreate in the Delta every day, generating a total of roughly 12 million visitor days of use annually and a direct economic impact of more than two hundred million dollars in spending per year.

Delta outdoor recreation categories, including general outdoor recreation, boating, fishing, hunting, and others have declined significantly since the 1990s but appear to have leveled off. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), in the Pacific Region (including California), the fishing participation rate has declined 50% since 1991, while hunting has declined 55%, and away-from-home wildlife watching is down 50%. There are no equivalent studies of Delta-specific participation rates, but based on Delta boating trends, it appears that participation is also down in the Delta. Since 2000, boating vessel registrations are down by 24% within the Delta’s Market Area. State Parks reports that statewide Activity Days for recreation activities common in the Delta are also down since 1995.

During the past thirty years, those statistics and other outdoor recreation patterns have undergone significant change – not just in the Delta but in California and nationwide. Long-term trends in participation rates in most popular Delta outdoor recreation categories, including general outdoor recreation, boating, fishing, hunting, and others have declined significantly since the 1990s but appear to have leveled off. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), in the Pacific Region (including California), the fishing participation rate has declined 50% since 1991, while hunting has declined 55%, and away-from-home wildlife watching is down 50%. There are no equivalent studies of Delta-specific participation rates, but based on Delta boating trends, it appears that participation is also down in the Delta. Since 2000, boating vessel registrations are down by 24% within the Delta’s Market Area. State Parks reports that statewide Activity Days for recreation activities common in the Delta are also down since 1995.

The future of the Delta is ever fluid. Recreation and tourism trends are changing as baby boomers slow down and the millennial generation develops spending power and new patterns of recreation. In the context of these shifting consumer preferences, the ESP provides a forward-looking perspective while being faithful to the history and current status of recreation and tourism contributions to the Delta as an evolving place.

To shed a light on these numbers and provide recommendations that seek to sustain and enhance the Delta recreation and tourism economy, the Delta Protection Commission initiated an update to the Recreation and Tourism Chapter of the Economic Sustainability Plan for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (ESP). As recreation and tourism represents the second-highest economic sector in the Delta, this update will help policymakers effectively respond to the key issues and trends influencing its economic sustainability. Data and findings in this report will inform and shape policy decisions that affect Delta recreation and its economic impacts.

To read the full ESP Recreation and Tourism Chapter updated visit: www.delta.ca.gov/regional-economy
World War II Prisoner of War (POW) camps often conjure up a relative’s recollection of his or her war experiences, the drama and heroism of classic films such as The Great Escape and Stalag 17, or the improbable sitcom Hogan’s Heroes. These places seem distant, bleak, and isolated, the grim reality of life under German, Italian, or Japanese authoritarian rule. Yet there were hundreds of POW camps throughout the United States, primarily housing Germans, but also Italians and Japanese. More than a dozen camps were in the Delta and Carquinez Strait, in addition to the interrogation center at PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS IN THE DELTA: The Lost Story


Camp Stockton was the primary POW camp in the region, occupying a portion of Rough and Ready Island, with a smaller branch at the San Joaquin County Fairgrounds. Other satellite locations for Camp Stockton were at Bacon Island, Benicia, Bouldin Island, Clarksburg, King Island, Lathrop, Rindge Tract, Roberts Island, Tracy, Upper Jones Tract, and Vernalis. Camp Stoneman in Pittsburg, which was the principal jumping-off point for American soldiers traveling to the Pacific, also contained POWs.
Many of these camps opened after Victory in Europe (V-E) Day (May 8, 1945), some well into 1946. Repatriation took time and the American government and employers took advantage of prisoner labor in a time when workers were in short supply. Many POWs worked in the fields, though the Stockton prisoners often assisted military operations. Strong supporters of the Nazi regime were weeded out before the prisoners arrived in these camps, so there tended to be few problems.

Life was more relaxed in these camps than one might expect. Although this was not typical, the second of the two Clarksburg camps had no fences or guards. Major Lester Heringer, who had been discharged from the U.S. Army in early 1946, ran the camp in the spring and summer of 1946 on his farm along Elk Slough. Prisoners primarily assisted with sugar beet production on nearby farms. The POWs held variety shows and, though officially prohibited, socialized with locals. They were paid in coupons that could be reimbursed for snack and toiletry items.

Interviews with former POWs show that they felt their treatment was good. Some even returned to the United States to live permanently. While little of these camps remains and most of the POWs and administrators have passed on, they undoubtedly helped ease American-German relations when they were at their lowest point.

The Barbed Wire Bowl

After the war ended, the American commanders at Rough and Ready and the Fairgrounds decided to teach the Germans prisoners American football and form two teams, Barager’s Bears and Kiernan’s Krushers, with equipment donated by local teams. The Bears and Krushers split two games against each other in early 1946, with the first game – dubbed by one author the “Barbed Wire Bowl” – attracting about 5,000 excited and bewildered spectators.
When people think of Delta agriculture, their front lawn may not be something that comes to mind, but sod production is big business in the Delta, ranking in the top 20 crops by acreage at 2,986 acres and 7th by value with $34,081,253 in revenue in 2016. This data has seen its ups and downs though - especially in drought years.

Summer of 2021 has 95% of California in a drought, with 46% of the state being in the driest “exceptional drought. This may seem like the wrong time to think about lush green grass, however, one Delta company is turning a new leaf on drought-tolerant sod science.

On McDonald Island just west of the City of Stockton, the Zuckerman family has been producing sod for more than 40 years. Ed Zuckerman is a third-generation farmer on his family’s Delta land, but it was his idea to test the waters (and the soil) for growing turf. In 1976 he was a 20-year-old with an inspired idea and by 1978 Delta Bluegrass Company was up and running with one customer and 78 acres of turf. Today, Zuckerman is not only the largest sod producer in the Delta but the largest producer in Northern and Central California with 1,400 acres servicing everything from commercial and residential landscape projects to habitat restoration and baseball fields.

Though the company has seen steady growth over the years, there have been challenging times as the drought years come and go. Zuckerman has had to
look towards a more sustainable future for both his company and the Delta. He advocates for protecting and restoring the Delta ecosystem as a Director of the Central Delta Water Agency and has rallied for his company to develop drought-tolerant grass.

Delta Bluegrass Company is serious about the science behind producing turf with optimum drought benefits. They run a full research and development (R&D) program on their McDonald Island farm to stay on the cutting edge of turf technology with their eyes set on the reduction of water use. One of the ways they do this is by using a lightbox technology diagnostic tool on their R&D plots. The lightbox system captures specialized photographs of the plots being tested. Those images are computer analyzed for aspects of color, density, and texture, and then rated on a quality scale.

The drought-tolerant grasses that make the grade and pass through the company’s R&D process come in many varieties. Native grass blends are an option that requires half the water rate as traditional sod, and they are growing in popularity. Zuckerman meets many people who are anti-turf, but, he says, “once they see the variety of landscape materials, how they’re grown, their water-saving capability and ease of maintenance, they almost always find a product that meets their needs.”
Delta Agency Meetings and Events

July

July 15 – Delta Protection Commission Meeting
www.delta.ca.gov/commission-meetings

July 15 & 16 – Delta Stewardship Council Meeting
www.deltacouncil.ca.gov/council-meetings

July 28 – Delta Conservancy Board Meeting
www.deltaconservancy.ca.gov/board-meeting-materials

July 29 – Delta Marketing Workshop Series: “Mixed Bag”
www.delta.ca.gov/calendar/marketing-workshop-4

August

August 5 – Alternate Delta Protection Commission Meeting
www.delta.ca.gov/commission-meetings

August 26 – Delta Stewardship Council Meeting
www.deltacouncil.ca.gov/council-meetings

August 30 – NHA Management Plan Open House and Public Workshop in Benicia
www.delta.ca.gov/NHA

August 31 – NHA Management Plan Open House and Public Workshop in Walnut Grove
www.delta.ca.gov/NHA

September

September TBA – National Heritage Area Management Plan Advisory Committee Meeting
www.delta.ca.gov/NHA

September TBA – Delta Protection Advisory Committee (DPAC) Meeting
www.delta.ca.gov/delta-protection-advisory-committee

September 4 – CA Free Fishing Day
www.wildlife.ca.gov/Licensing/Fishing/Free-Fishing-Days

September 16 – Delta Protection Commission Meeting
www.delta.ca.gov/commission-meetings

September 23 – Delta Stewardship Council Meeting
www.deltacouncil.ca.gov/council-meetings

Delta Waterway Cleanup
9.18.21

Cleaning neighborhoods, parks, street gutters, and waterways helps to protect not only the Delta but also our oceans, as trash travels through storm drains, creeks, and rivers both locally and out to the coastline and beyond. Join us in Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, Yolo, and Contra Costa Counties for the 2021 The Delta Waterway Cleanup, part of California Coastal Cleanup Day! More information and registration are available at:

www.delta.ca.gov/cleanup

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