

The Ash Creek Wildlife Area (ACWA) is an example of a local rancher who provided land for conservation efforts with an understanding that managed lands promote wildlife enhancement for the enjoyment of all. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has largely left the property unmanaged. (Albaugh 2021) While the ACWA does offer some refuge, most species graze and rear their young on the private lands around the Basin which are actively being cultivated because those lands offer better forage and protection from predators. Below is an account from the former land owner of how the ACWA property has fared since being sold to the government.

The government bought the ranch as a refuge for birds and wildlife. When I was running cattle on that ranch it was alive with waterfowl. They fed around and amongst the cattle. It was a natural refuge. The cattle kept the feed down so the birds didn't have to worry about predators, and they could feed on the new growth grass. After the government got their hands on it all the fences were removed, at taxpayer expense. In the years since, the meadows have turned into a jungle -- old dead feed and tules. The birds are gone, moved to other ranches where they get protection from skunks and coyotes and other predators that work on waterfowl and wildlife. Under the management of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife the value of the land has been completely destroyed. All those acres of wonderful grass and the irrigation system that for generations have produced food for the people of this country now *produce nothing*. (Stadtler 2007)

Recently the CDFW has attempted to manage the property by constructing a 65-acre wetland using their water rights from the Big Valley Canal. In conjunction with the project and to more efficiently move adjudicated water to users (including ACWA) down-canal, the CDFW constructed a ¾-mile pipeline to replace an unlined portion of the canal. The pipeline has increased flows down-canal of the pipeline from 4cfs to 8cfs. The abandoned portion of unlined canal travels through a private land-owner's property. Although there are no documented water rights holders on the abandoned canal, it has dried that portion of the land-owner's property and reduced groundwater recharge there. However, overall the constructed wetlands likely provide more recharge on the ACWA property than the abandoned canal provided on private property. (CDFW 2021)

Activities such as this from state agencies exacerbates the negative sentiments from local stakeholders toward state government and make them extremely wary of unintended consequences of government programs. This, coupled with the burden imposed on locals through regulations such as SGMA, are some of the fundamental reasons why residents of this area generally consider themselves distinct from the rest of the state. Furthermore, local political leaders have pointed out that the state is behind on tax payments to the disadvantaged counties. (Albaugh 2021)

The BVGB not only differs politically, but also differs physically from California's other groundwater basins because the climate sees extreme cold. On average there are fewer warm temperature days, making the growing season considerably shorter than in other parts of the state. Ground elevations in the Basin range from about 4,100 to over 5,000 feet and along with its northerly latitude in the state, creates conditions where snow can fall in any month of the year. According to the Farmer's Almanac, the average growing season for the Big Valley Basin is about 101 days. The typical crops for the Big Valley