

- Gateways - locations which mark the entrance to a community or geographic area.

### **Value of Scenic Highways and Corridors**

Scenic corridors make major contributions to the quality of life enjoyed by the residents of Colusa County. The development of community pride, the enhancement of property values, and the protection of aesthetically-pleasing open spaces reflecting a preference for the rural lifestyle are all ways in which scenic corridors are valuable to County residents.

Scenic highways and their associated corridors also strengthen the tourist industry of Colusa County. For many visitors, highway corridors will provide their only experience of Colusa County. Enhancement and protection of these corridors ensures that the tourist experience continues to be a positive one and, consequently, provides support for the tourist-related activities of the County's economy.

### **Designated and Eligible Scenic Facilities**

According to the California Scenic Highway Mapping System, administered by Caltrans, there are no officially designated scenic highways or scenic corridors in Colusa County. However, there are two Eligible State Scenic Highway Corridors in Colusa County that have not yet been officially designated.

1. In southwestern Colusa County the segment of SR 20 between the County line and the junction of SR 20 and SR 16 is eligible for designation as a State Scenic Highway.
2. In southwestern Colusa County the segment of SR 16 between the County line and the junction of SR 20 and SR 16 is eligible for designation as a State Scenic Highway.

## **NATURAL SCENIC RESOURCES**

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Colusa County encompasses an outstanding variety of natural vistas and landscapes. The following section describes the significant scenic resources found in the county.

**Agricultural Lands.** As described above, much of the land in Colusa County is currently in active agricultural production. While not a natural condition of the land, agricultural lands are perceived by many viewers as having a relatively high level of scenic value. Agricultural lands in Colusa County consist of orchards, row crops, rice fields, and rangeland. Agricultural lands provide scenic viewsheds largely void of man-made structures. Many viewers perceive large swaths of land neatly covered in various types of crops as having a very high scenic value.

The eastern half of the County is dominated by a “checkerboard” of large acreage farms, with land ownership and road alignments generally following square mile section lines. Views of agricultural lands in the eastern portion of the County are expansive, and framed primarily by the rolling foothills of the Coast Range to the west and the jagged peaks of the Sutter Buttes to the east.

In the western portions of the County, large farms give way to much larger cattle and sheep ranches, cultivated fields give way to arid rangeland, and the flat terrain found throughout the eastern portions of the County transitions into rolling hills and spectacular upland valleys. Further

west, the land becomes even more rugged and wild as elevations increase up to 7,000 feet in the Mendocino National Forest and the wilderness areas surrounding Snow Mountain.

**Sutter Buttes.** The Sutter Buttes are a small circular complex of eroded volcanic lava domes which rise above the flat plains of the Central Valley of California. The highest peak, South Butte, reaches about 2,130 feet (650 m) above sea level. The Buttes are located just outside of Yuba City, California in the Sacramento Valley, the northern part of the Central Valley. They are named for John Sutter, who received a large land grant from the Mexican government. The Sutter Buttes also hold the title of being the world's smallest mountain range. While not located within Colusa County, the Sutter Buttes provide a distinct visual backdrop to the eastern portion of Colusa County.

The indigenous Maidu referred to the Sutter Buttes as *Esto Yamani* and the native Patwin called them *Onolai*, both names roughly translate to mean The Middle Mountains. They were regarded as a spiritual place for renewal and sustenance rather than a place to live or build villages. A tour of the Sutter Buttes can yield historical markers, rock walls, the remains of old stone corrals, building foundations, historic homes and even a circular stone-lined well right beside the road. Several cemeteries are scattered around the Buttes.

**Snow Mountain.** Snow Mountain is a mountain with two 7,000+ summits named Snow Mountain East and Snow Mountain West, located on the border of Colusa County and Lake County in the northwestern portion of Colusa County. The East peak is the highest point of both counties. The mountain is part of the Pacific Coast Ranges mountain system and it is the first tall peak in the California Coast Ranges north of San Francisco. On clear days, the peak can be seen from Mount Diablo, and from several peaks in the Mayacamas Mountains, such as Mount Saint Helena, and Mount Konocti. Usually, the peaks are quite prominent from the California Central Valley, moreover the Sacramento Valley, such as from Interstate 5. On clear days the peaks can be seen from most vantage points in Colusa County. Like its name states, the summits and nearby high mountains get snowfall in winter, and the snowpack can last until June. The mountain gives its name to the 37,700-acre Mountain Wilderness in the Mendocino National Forest.

### **National Wildlife Refuges and Wildlife Management Areas**

The Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex consists of five national wildlife refuges (NWR) and three wildlife management areas (WMA) that comprise over 35,000 acres of wetlands and uplands in the Sacramento Valley, California. In addition, there are over 30,000 acres of conservation easements in the Complex. The Refuges and easements are part of the USFWS; they serve as resting and feeding areas for nearly half the migratory birds on the Pacific Flyway.

**COLUSA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE.** The Colusa National Wildlife Refuge is a 4,507-acre refuge primarily consisting of intensively managed wetland impoundments, with some grassland and riparian habitat. This Wildlife Refuge typically supports wintering populations of more than 200,000 ducks and 50,000 geese. Wetland impoundments are intensively managed to provide optimal habitat for the dense concentration of wintering waterfowl, as well as habitat for resident wildlife and spring/summer migrants.

The grassland habitat supports several populations of endangered and sensitive species of plants. The refuge is a stronghold for populations of the endangered palmate-bracted bird's-beak and the threatened giant garter snake. About 35,000 visitors come to the refuge each year for wildlife viewing and 4,000 come to hunt waterfowl and pheasant.

**DELEVAN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE.** The Delevan National Wildlife Refuge is a 5,797-acre refuge consisting of over 4,500 acres of intensively managed wetlands and 1,200 acres of uplands. More than 200,000 ducks and 100,000 geese come to the refuge each winter. The Wildlife Refuge supports several endangered plants and animals: giant garter snake, wintering peregrine falcon and bald eagle, breeding tricolored blackbird, and a large colony of the endangered palmate-bracted bird's beak. Resident wildlife include grebe, heron, blackbird, beaver, muskrat, black tailed deer and other species typical of upland and wetland habitats. Approximately 7,000 people hunt on the refuge each year and an estimated 1,000 visitors observe wildlife from a primitive roadside overlook along the Maxwell-Colusa Highway.

**SACRAMENTO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE.** The Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge is a 10,783-acre refuge consisting of about 7,600 acres of intensively managed wetlands, uplands, riparian habitat, and vernal pools. It typically supports wintering populations of more than 600,000 ducks and 200,000 geese. The refuge supports several endangered plants and animals, including transplanted colonies of palmate-bracted birds-beak, several species of fairy shrimp, vernal pool tadpole shrimp, giant garter snake, wintering peregrine falcon, bald eagle, and breeding tricolored blackbird. Resident wildlife includes grebe, heron, blackbird, golden eagle, beaver, muskrat, black-tailed deer, and other species typical of upland and wetland habitats. Approximately 9,000 people hunt on the refuge each year, and 73,000 people use the visitor center, auto tour route, and walking trail.

**WILLOW CREEK-LURLINE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA.** The Willow Creek-Lurline Wildlife Management Area is an approximately 20,000 acre area that has been approved for acquisition of conservation easements on privately owned wetlands to protect fall/winter habitat for waterfowl. Approximately 12,000 acres of the Wildlife Management Area are privately owned for the purpose of waterfowl hunting. Conservation easements have been acquired on approximately 6,000 acres, requiring landowners to maintain land in wetlands. The area is surrounded by intensive agriculture (rice and other grains). These privately-owned lands are closed to public access.

**NORTH CENTRAL VALLEY WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA.** The North Central Valley Wildlife Management Area was established primarily to protect wintering habitat for waterfowl. Under the North Central Valley WMA the USFWS has the authority to purchase conservation easements on up to 48,750 acres of private lands located within an 11 county area of the Sacramento Valley. Within this management area, the Service has purchased conservation easements on 11,811 acres from willing landowners to protect wildlife habitat. In exchange for payment, the landowners agree to maintain wetlands and other habitats on their property in perpetuity. These Wildlife Management lands are privately owned and not open for public access.

### State Recreational Areas

**COLUSA-SACRAMENTO RIVER STATE RECREATION AREA.** The Colusa-Sacramento River State Recreation Area has 67 acres along the Sacramento River. Wildlife in the area includes deer, raccoons, opossums, foxes, skunks and muskrats, which are sheltered by riverbank cottonwood and willow trees. Wild grape and fig are among many other shrubs, trees and plants along the river. Common bird species include ring-necked pheasants, California quail, mallard ducks, Canada geese, western meadowlarks, northern flickers and ospreys. This facility provides 14 campsites, picnic sites, and a launch ramp for small boats, and is also within walking distance of the City of Colusa's downtown.

### State Wildlife Areas

**COLUSA BYPASS WILDLIFE AREA.** This 1,248 acre wildlife area is mostly grasslands with several rows of willows and cottonwood trees that line the eastern edge of the property. Excess water is diverted into the area from the Sacramento River during high flows in the winter. The area provides a significant amount of cover for mammals and both resident and migratory birds. Hunting is allowed and opportunities are mostly for upland game, including deer, pheasant, snipe, and dove. Bird watching and wildlife viewing are also common.

**SACRAMENTO RIVER WILDLIFE AREA.** This 4,014 acre wildlife area is located in 14 separate units along the west and east side of the Sacramento River in Butte, Glenn, and Colusa Counties. The wildlife area is a riparian forest dominated by cottonwood, willow, ash, sycamore, and box elder trees with a dense understory of wild grape, pipevine, poison oak and grasslands, oxbow lakes, and gravel bars. Common wildlife along the river includes otters, beavers, gray fox, bobcat, western pond turtles, ash-throated flycatchers, great blue herons, egrets, and a variety of birds of prey. Hunting is allowed and opportunities are mostly for deer, quail, turnkey, and dove. Fishing, trapping, and bird watching are also common.

### US Bureau of Reclamation Projects

**EAST PARK RESERVOIR.** East Park Reservoir was authorized in 1907 by the federal government as a storage facility to provide irrigation waters, under the Orland Project. East Park Reservoir is in the northwestern part of Colusa County, a few miles southeast of Stonyford and northwest of Lodoga. The total land area around the reservoir is 2,468 acres and the total water surface is 1,820 acres. Common mammals are wild pigs, coyotes, blacktail deer, tule elk, ground squirrels and black-tailed jackrabbits. Canada geese, bald eagles, a wide variety of ducks and bird species, and the special status tri-colored blackbird can be seen around the reservoir. East Park Reservoir provides opportunities for camping, boating, picnicking and fishing.

### American Land Conservancy

**BEAR VALLEY RANCH.** A conservation easement over the 16,513-acre Bear Valley Ranch was acquired by the American Land Conservancy in 2001. The conservation easement permanently precludes development on the property, while permitting traditional cattle ranching. The ranch is known as having one of the state's most spectacular wildflower displays. This conservation easement was funded by the California Wildlife Conservation Board and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The easement is monitored by California Rangeland Trust.

**SULPHUR CREEK.** The American Land Conservancy acquired 1,531 acres in the Sulphur Creek valley in 1999. The Sulphur Creek valley is part of a 6,500-acre watershed located in the coastal range. From 2002 to 2005, the American Land Conservancy oversaw a three-year restoration effort on the property that was funded by the California Wildlife Conservation Board. The area was once heavily mined for gold, but is now known for the natural hot springs that are part of the historic Wilbur Hot Springs resort. The American Land Conservancy sold the resort subject to a conservation easement that precludes development of the land and protects the oak woodlands, grasslands and riparian habitat.

**PAYNE RANCH.** A conservation easement over the 3,140-acre Payne Ranch was acquired by the American Land Conservancy in 2006. Payne Ranch is a private working cattle ranch in Colusa County. The southern border of the Payne Ranch is contiguous to 27,245 acres specially-designated as the Cache Creek Wilderness Area, home to one of the largest free roaming Tule Elk populations in California, the second largest wintering bald eagle population in the state, as well as numerous rare and endangered plant and animal communities. The conservation easement conserves the agricultural, ecological, and scenic resources of the property while contributing to the environmental health of the surrounding 70,000-acre Cache Creek Natural Area. The Payne Ranch connects to two other American Land Conservancy projects in the region – Bear Valley Ranch and Sulphur Creek, which together conserve nearly 20,000 acres that contribute to the region’s rich biodiversity. The conservation easement was funded by the California Wildlife Conservation Board.

## National Forests

**Mendocino National Forest.** The Mendocino National Forest is 913,306 acres and lies in parts of six counties, including Colusa, Lake, Glenn, Mendocino, Tehama, and Trinity. Elevations in the Forest range from 750 feet to 8,092 feet, with the average elevation about 4,000 feet. An estimated 60,000 acres of old growth forests occur here, including forests of Douglas-fir, Ponderosa Pine, White Fir, Tanoak, and Pacific madrone. The Mendocino National Forest is the only one of California's 18 national Forests that are not crossed by a paved road or highway and it is attractive to people seeking outdoor recreation. The Forest provides resources through logging and grazing, in addition to its recreational activities.

## Rivers

**Sacramento River.** The Sacramento River traverses the eastern portion of Colusa County in a north-south direction, stretching from the northern county border to the southern county border. South of the City of Colusa, the Sacramento River generally demarcates the County’s eastern boundary. The Sacramento River corridor in Colusa County provides numerous opportunities for recreational activities such as hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, boating and other water sports. The river corridor is home to countless plant, animal and aquatic species and numerous habitat types. Areas of the river corridor have been developed with parks and boat launch facilities to provide for public access to the river. The Sacramento River feeds, and is fed by, numerous creeks, streams and tributaries throughout Colusa County and neighboring Counties.