Native Plants Enhance Working Waterways in Rio Vista
by, Miles DaPrato, Solano Resource Conservation District

Back in 2014, Hearn Livestock entered into a partnership with the Solano Resource Conservation District (RCD) to enhance habitat features on the Petersen Ranch just north of Rio Vista. Funding for the project came through grants that targeted natural resource conservation on working landscapes from the California Department of Water Resources, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy (Delta Conservancy) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Five separate areas along irrigation drainage ditches were identified on the ranch by the Hearns as problematic to manage for weeds and suitable to test the practices of "wildlife friendly farming" through native plant establishment. In addition to the installation of riparian vegetation along those drainages, the project aimed to develop critical ranch infrastructure such as cross fencing and water troughs that were needed to more efficiently and effectively rotate animals throughout the fields of irrigated pasture.

While the process of establishing the layers of native vegetation (native grasses and wildflowers, trees and shrubs) was challenging during these drought years, the persistence of weed control and a little supplemental irrigation enabled us to deliver on the vision of creating habitat corridors across part of the ranches' irrigation network (Figures 1 thru 4)

Figure 1. Irrigation drainage site at Petersen Ranch before planting native riparian buffer.
Figure 2. Irrigation drainage site at Petersen Ranch after installation of native riparian vegetation.

Solano RCD is excited to continue this collaboration with our conservation partners and Hearn Livestock. We'll be working with the Delta Conservancy through Proposition 1 funding and with NRCS through their Environmental Quality Incentives Program. During this second phase of the project, the RCD and our partners will work with the landowner to design and implement additional conservation measures that will improve their ability to manage water, soil, livestock, and wildlife habitat resources on the property. This effort will build on the success of riparian habitat buffers previously installed by Solano RCD and connect to the natural riparian habitat features of Lindsey Slough in the North Delta of Solano County.
Figure 3: Water drainage at Petersen Ranch before planting native riparian buffer.

Figure 4: Water drainage at Petersen Ranch after planting riparian buffer.