

North of Sacramento

## Butte County

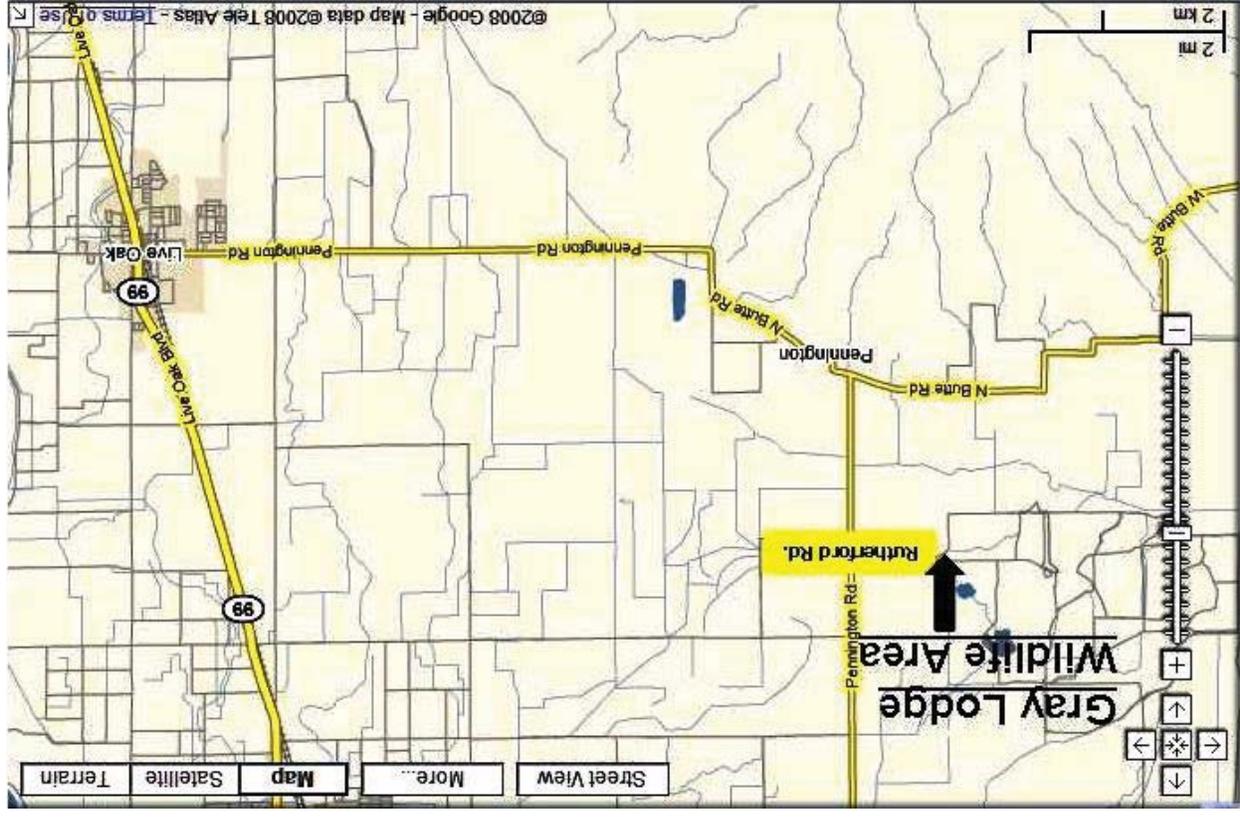
### Gray Lodge Wildlife Area

Gray Lodge consists of 8,400 acres of intensively developed waterfowl marshland near Live Oak, north of the Sutter Buttes. Over 200 species of birds have been recorded for the area, and 60 species are known to nest there. A 2.5 mile route is open to car travel. There are three parking areas along the route, and many foot trails are marked for your walking pleasure. There is also a small museum near the headquarters. Permission is required to enter certain closed areas. The best time for observing waterfowl at Gray Lodge is during the hunting season, which concentrates birds in the closed zones. This generally occurs from mid-October to mid-January. The main goose flights do not arrive until early November. On public hunting days, birders must obtain a visitor's pass at the check station before going to the sanctuary area.

**Birding the site:** In winter, you will often see the sky filled with geese and ducks. Snow Geese, as well as the greatest concentration of Ross's Geese in the United States, are found here along with Greater White-fronted Geese and Canada Geese. Look for the rare blue morph of the Snow Goose. The climax vegetation of tule-cattails holds many Marsh Wrens and you may spot one of the secretive rails: Virginia Rail or Sora. There are huge concentrations of ducks including Northern Pintail, Mallard, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal and Gadwall. A rare but regular visitor is the Eurasian Wigeon. Most of these birds fly north for nesting, but many others remain. Common nesting birds include White-tailed Kite, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, and Killdeer.

A full day can include covering the area around the Sutter Buttes just south and west of Gray Lodge (West Butte Road), as it contains excellent raptors such as Ferruginous Hawk and Prairie Falcon, along with the more common species. In spring, nesting Lesser Nighthawks are present in the Buttes Sink area. Flocks of Sandhill Cranes and Tundra Swans are more likely here than in the refuge in winter. Uncommon to rare birds such as Vesper Sparrow, Mountain Bluebird, Sage Thrasher and Lark Bunting have been found. For maximum enjoyment, a spotting scope is a must. You may wish to bring a camera to record highlights, although a telephoto lens is a must for most bird pictures. A picnic lunch is recommended. During the winter, dress for cold, wet, and foggy weather.

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**Directions:** From Sacramento, take Interstate 5 for 7 miles north of Highway 50. Take the Highway 99/Highway 70 exit (exit 525B) toward Marysville/Yuba City. After 12.5 miles, at the 99/70 split, take Highway 99 toward Yuba City—do not take Highway 70. Stay on Highway 99 for another 32 miles, heading through Yuba City to Live Oak. At Live Oak, turn left on Pennington Road. Pennington Road will make several turns and bends trending north/northwest after 5.9 miles, where it becomes Powell Road for 0.5 mile, then bears left to become North Butte Road for 1.8 miles. After about eight miles from Highway 99, turn right on Almond Orchard Avenue. From here, it is 1.7 miles to Rutherford Road. Turn left (west) on Rutherford Road into the Gray Lodge Wildlife Area. There is currently a \$2.50 per person entrance fee.

*Ed Greaves*

**The Sutter Buttes:** For an opportunity to visit the Central Valley's only mountain range, contact the Middle Mountain Foundation ([middlemountain.org](http://middlemountain.org)).