



# GEI Consultants Environmental Insights

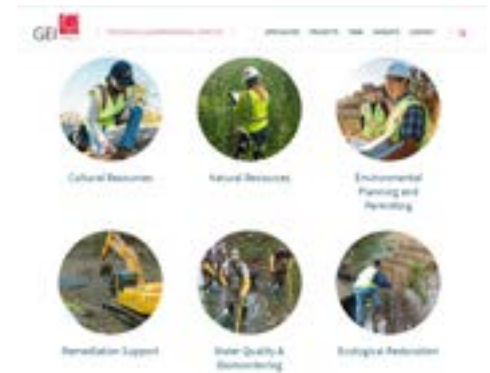
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# Practice and People Updates

## GEI Launches Its Environmental Microsite

GEI has launched a new microsite that highlights our growing ecological and environmental practice. The microsite allows you to meet our team, explore our ecological and environmental services, and learn about some of our projects. GEI specializes in broad and extensive multi-disciplinary ecological and environmental services which are often integrated with our other practice areas. This integration better enables innovative solutions that are more effective, efficient, and reduce overall project costs.

To explore our microsite, please visit: <https://ecoandenviro.geiconsultants.com/>



## Technology and Equipment Augmentations

GEI's Environmental Practice has increased our aquatic services capabilities with the addition of a motorboat to our fleet. The motorboat allows GEI staff to better perform wetland delineations, habitat assessments, rare plant surveys, and bank erosion and stabilization analyses and design from waterside locations. The boat is currently being used to collect water quality samples for El Dorado Irrigation District's Folsom Lake Raw Water Intake Improvements Project in support of the Folsom Lake Raw Water Intake Improvements Project for the El Dorado Irrigation District.

### GEI Contact



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For the past year, biological and cultural field personnel have been using digital field forms designed using an application called Fulcrum. The application is very versatile, simple to use, and able to design both simple and complex forms. The digital forms can be uploaded in the field and instantly available to project managers and other office personnel. GEI's Environmental Practice is consistently using this application for a variety of surveys and monitoring, which results in streamlining, speeding, and smoothing the collection of field data and improving work performance and value for clients.

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# Practice and People Updates (continued)

## GEI's Leticia Morris on California Native Grassland Association's Board of Directors

Excitedly entering the second year of her 2-year term, GEI's Leticia Morris continues to serve on the Board of Directors with the California Native Grassland Association (CNGA; see [www.cnga.org](http://www.cnga.org)). Founded in 1991, CNGA focuses its concern with the continued loss and degradation of California's grasslands, one of the most threatened ecosystems in California. As agriculture, invasive species, development, and other human-related activities have significantly reduced California native grasslands, CNGA's mission is to promote, preserve, and restore the diversity of California's native grasses and grassland ecosystem.

Through a network of dedicated volunteers, graduate student researchers, concerned members, and public stakeholders, CNGA promotes grasslands through education, advocacy, research, and stewardship. Its Board of Directors are elected on behalf of the organization's members, funders, and government to help facilitate this promotion of grasslands. A few of this year's CNGA advocacy opportunities include participation in the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition Summit, the OHMVR Soil Standard and Guidelines Public Comment Meeting process, native upland restoration at Grizzly Island, and Xerces Society pollinator habitat kit project launch.

This year, Leticia serves on the Education and Information Committee, the Outreach and Development Committee, and the Website Committee. In her role, she seeks new opportunities to bring more members into the fold of grassland preservation, and will be looking for more grant opportunities to support local restoration efforts for any interested parties. And because associate and corporate members play a significant role in CNGA's ability to accomplish its mission, Leticia recruited GEI into the fold so that GEI's Restoration Team can actively share their expertise and collaborate in local native grassland restoration efforts too!



GEI Contact



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## Policy Updates to Migratory Bird Protections

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) guides the protection and management of more than 1,000 migratory bird species across the United States. Born out of the 1916 treaty, it is one of the United States' oldest and most significant wildlife-focused laws and is enforced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In January 2021, the USFWS issued a Final Rule codifying the Trump Administration's interpretation that the prohibitions of the MBTA only apply to actions "directed at" migratory birds, their nests, or their eggs, and would prevent the USFWS from regulating incidental or accidental taking of migratory species listed under the MBTA. The rule was set to take effect on February 6.



Burrowing Owl

President Biden froze the implementation of Trump-era regulations pending review by the new administration. Further, the Department of Interior's Solicitor's M-37050 Opinion, which provides much of the legal basis for the Final Rule, was recently vacated by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, with the judge upholding that the language of the MBTA clearly prohibits incidental take.

It is likely that the Final Rule will be rescinded, vacated, or disapproved. MBTA compliance would likely be enforced through guidance documents and best management practices, with the regulated community acting in reliance on USFWS exercising its enforcement discretion. To address this uncertainty, the Biden Administration is seeking to develop a regulatory permitting program to authorize certain incidental takes of migratory birds. The House of Representatives is now considering the Migratory Bird Protection Act of 2020, which would ensure that the MBTA applies to the incidental take of all migratory birds protected by the law, and would require the USFWS to consult with industry officials on permits that allow incidental take to avoid negligence. GEI's permitting team is actively tracking this issue.

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# Project Updates

## Construction Complete on Two Key TRLIA Projects

### Construction Completion of Yuba Goldfields 200-year Flood Protection Project

Since 2014, GEI environmental staff have been supporting the Three Rivers Levee Improvement Authority (TRLIA) on this key component of its flood risk reduction program. The project includes constructing a levee south of the Yuba Goldfields to extend the State Plan of Flood Control and prevent Yuba River flood flows during a 200-year flood event from reaching properties in southwestern Yuba County. After many years of hard work by TRLIA and the consultant team, construction of the new levee and associated infrastructure was completed in April. GEI environmental staff have supported this project through all stages of planning, design, permitting, and implementation, including conducting biological and cultural resources investigations, preparing an EIR and Supplemental EIR, obtaining wetland regulatory permits, supporting Endangered Species Act Section 7 and National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 consultations, facilitating Native American consultation, and monitoring project construction. This is the fourth major TRLIA flood protection project for which GEI staff have provided a full suite of environmental compliance services.



### Feather River Setback Conservation Bank Project Milestone

TRLIA achieved another key project milestone this spring when installation of riparian restoration plantings at the Feather River Setback Conservation Bank was completed by River Partners. In 2009, TRLIA completed construction of a setback levee east of the Feather River and degraded approximately 6 miles of the existing levee, reconnecting over 1,000 acres of floodplain to the river. Although funding was not available for large-scale restoration of the setback area at the time, TRLIA did not give up on the goal to expand on the more than 3,000 acres of remnant riparian habitat along this portion of the river that provides key habitat for many common and special-status species, including Swainson's hawk and western yellow-billed cuckoo. Since obtaining funding for this project, TRLIA has worked with River Partners to develop and implement a restoration plan and continues to work with the Sacramento Valley Conservancy, CDFW, and USFWS to establish a conservation bank on more than 500 acres of restored riparian habitat in the setback area. GEI staff have supported this important project by providing biological and cultural resource surveys, CEQA compliance (IS/MND), and wetland and endangered species regulatory support.

#### GEI Contact



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# Project Updates (continued)

## Western Region All-in on Adaptation

GEI knows our clients are facing big challenges in the west, and we have the experts to help clients assess risks and safeguard their assets, whether they're facing rising floods or fiercer fires. Our recently completed Monterey Sea Level Rise Adaptation Study, featured in the Monterey Herald (see: <https://www.montereyherald.com/2020/12/11/monterey-facing-major-impact-from-sea-level-rise/>), provides one example of how we're helping clients find opportunities to thrive in a shifting world.

## Adapting Monterey's Transportation Network to Sea Level Rise

GEI, working with Kimley-Horn, Inc, took basic flood maps for the city, and worked with city experts to develop illustrations of the failure cascades that rising seas pose to Monterey's critical transportation corridors, lifeline infrastructure, and residents. Our graphics allow city staff and residents to absorb and prioritize the complex threats they face.

We then provided over 20 conceptual options to minimize those risks, in packages that fell under either "barriers" to keep the sea out of downtown and maintain current infrastructure with new pumps to manage inland flooding, or "retreat" which provides the city a new harbor within the heart of downtown. The study lays the groundwork for city- and region-wide decisions on how climate adaptation can minimize impacts to the interlinked components of Monterey's community and lifeline infrastructure. Costs and benefits for both options were described. Finally, GEI worked with the City to prepare grant applications to multiple state and federal agencies, to allow them to further study which approach will best meet the needs of their residents in the decades to come.

### GEI Contact



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### Planned Retreat: Reimagining Monterey



Monterey Retreat

### Living Behind Barriers



Monterey Barrier

# Project Updates (continued)

## GEI Supports WSAFCA and CDFW with Development of the First Mitigation Crediting Agreement

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) began administering the Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS) Program in 2017. This new program encourages a voluntary, non-regulatory regional planning process intended to result in high-quality conservation outcomes and includes a mechanism for securing advance mitigation. In 2020, CDFW approved the Yolo RCIS, which was prepared by the Yolo Habitat Conservancy (YHC) and the California Department of Water Resources (DWR). GEI is supporting the West Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency (WSAFCA) with development of the program's first Mitigation Credit Agreement (MCA)—the Southport Pilot MCA—under the Yolo RCIS.

GEI's Vance Howard and Kelly Holland have been working with WSAFCA since early 2020 to prepare the Southport Pilot MCA, which will secure more than 140 acres of advance mitigation for WSAFCA to use to compensate for future project impacts associated with implementation of the West Sacramento Levee Improvement Program. The advance mitigation was created by the multi-benefit Southport Levee Improvement Project, which included construction of a setback levee that created more than 120 acres of new floodplain area. GEI prepared restoration plans and specifications and supported WSAFCA with restoring riparian, wetland, shallow water, and shaded riverine aquatic habitat in the new floodplain area and on the remnant levee, which was breached in three locations to connect the floodplain to the Sacramento River.

The Southport Pilot MCA is being developed in close coordination with CDFW. In addition to creating an MCA to be used by WSAFCA, the process is intended to inform revisions to the Draft MCA Guidelines and potentially legislative amendments to make the RCIS Program an efficient and cost-effective way to secure advance mitigation that is created by multi-benefit projects. The final approval of the Southport Pilot MCA is anticipated in the summer 2021.

### GEI Contact



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# Project Updates (continued)

## GEI Assisting with Analysis to Repair Irrigation Infrastructure Damaged by Wildlife

Contracted through University Enterprises, GEI was selected to prepare an Options Study Report for the Paradise Irrigation District (PID). Following the devastating fires in the Paradise region, much of the infrastructure was damaged or needs replacement. The region has seen a decrease in water supply demand due to decreases primarily in residential, municipal, and industrial demand. This set of circumstances has led PID to seek consultant help in developing a suite of local and regional, multi-benefit alternatives that use a combination of new and existing water rights, infrastructure, and agreements. The final product will contain an evaluation of the feasibility of each of the selected alternatives. Alternatives will be analyzed in categories such as cost, implementation risk, environmental documentation, and climate resiliency. GEI is excited to help PID rebuild the region more sustainably while offering innovative solutions to their current and future water demands.

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## Delivering Environmental Compliance and Permitting Services for the Inland Empire

Teamed with Tom Dodson and Associates out of San Bernardino, GEI was recently awarded a 7-year Master Services Agreement to provide environmental services for Inland Empire Utilities Agency. Services provided under this contract will include NEPA/CEQA compliance and permitting to aid the agency in implementing local and regional infrastructure projects identified in the agency's numerous planning documents, as well as providing grant proposal support. This contract compliments GEI's current and outgoing work with IEUA related to the implementation of the Chino Basin Program being partially funded by a \$207M grant from the California Water Commission through the State's Proposition 1 Water Storage Investment Program.

