

**Notice of Preparation and Notice of Public Scoping Meetings
for an Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report
for the Yolo Natural Heritage Program Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural
Community Conservation Plan**

October 21, 2011

Introduction

The Yolo County Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan Joint Powers Agency (JPA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) plan to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) on the Yolo Natural Heritage Program Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan (HCP/NCCP or Plan) for Yolo County. This is a comprehensive, county-wide plan designed to provide long-term conservation and management of natural communities, sensitive species, and the habitats upon which those species depend, while accommodating other important uses of the land. The Plan serves as a habitat conservation plan (HCP) pursuant to the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), and a natural community conservation plan (NCCP) under the California Natural Community Conservation Planning Act (NCCPA). The JPA is composed of members representing Yolo County; the Cities of Davis, West Sacramento, Winters, and Woodland; and the University of California at Davis (Local Partners).

The EIS/EIR will be prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The JPA, acting as the lead agency under CEQA, and the Service, acting as the lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), have determined that an EIS/EIR should be prepared for the Plan. In accordance with NEPA, the Service is publishing a notice of intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register*. The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) is a Responsible Agency and a Trustee Agency for purposes of CEQA.

The Plan area encompasses the entire area of Yolo County—approximately 653,817 acres (see Figures 1 and 2 for regional location and Plan area maps). Covered species are those species addressed in the Plan for which conservation actions will be implemented and for which the JPA and Local Partners will seek incidental take authorizations for a period of up to 50 years. Species proposed for coverage in the Plan are species that currently are federally- and/or state-listed as threatened or endangered, or have the potential to become listed during the life of the Plan, and have some likelihood to occur in the Plan area. The Plan is expected to address 35 listed and nonlisted wildlife and plant species (see Covered Species below). The permits are needed to authorize take of listed species that could occur as a result of implementation activities covered under the Plan (see Covered Activities below).

This notice also serves to notify the public of scoping meetings and the public comment period regarding the scope of the EIS/EIR. Additional details regarding meeting locations and times and the public comment period are provided in this notice.

Yolo Natural Heritage Program HCP/NCCP

Background

The JPA was formed in August 2002 to serve as the lead agency for the preparation of the county-wide HCP/NCCP. The Plan describes the measures that will be undertaken to conserve important biological resources, obtain permits for urban growth and public infrastructure projects, and ensure the continuation of Yolo County's rich agricultural heritage.

In 2005, the JPA entered into a Planning Agreement with CDFG and the Service, pursuant to the NCCPA, that set out the initial scope of the program and defined the roles and responsibilities of the parties in the development of the Plan. The Planning Agreement has helped guide the HCP/NCCP planning process and to define the initial scope of the effort.

The purpose of the Plan is to provide a systematic and holistic approach to the protection and enhancement of Yolo County's unique and important biodiversity and establish an efficient means by which various land uses take place in compliance with state and federal regulatory requirements. To that end, the HCP/NCCP will provide for the long-term conservation and management of sensitive species and help resolve significant regulatory compliance issues for a range of land uses that occur in the county. The Plan also is designed to accommodate appropriate economic and development activity, support the County's vibrant agricultural economy, and enhance recreational opportunities. The HCP/NCCP will complement a number of other local efforts aimed at advancing conservation objectives in Yolo County.

The proposed Plan is consistent with and is intended to support compliance with other federal and state wildlife and related laws and regulations, other local conservation planning efforts, and the County's general plan. The Yolo County Board of Supervisors adopted the 2030 Countywide General Plan, and certified the associated EIR for the updated general plan on November 10, 2009 (SCH #2008102034).

Project Description

The Plan is being prepared under the combined efforts of the JPA, in coordination with the Service and CDFG. The proposed Plan is designed to streamline and coordinate existing processes for review and permitting of public and private activities that potentially affect protected species. To meet this goal, the Plan sets out a conservation strategy that includes measures to ensure that impacts on covered species and habitats related to covered activities are avoided, minimized, or mitigated, as appropriate. These covered activities encompass the range of existing and future activities that are associated with much of the regional economy (see Covered Activities below). The Plan is further intended to reinforce the role of local government in overseeing local land use planning and decision-making.

Plan Area

The Plan area encompasses the entire area of Yolo County—approximately 653,817 acres (see Figure 1 and 2 for regional location and Plan area maps). With the exception of federal lands, the Plan area, which is synonymous with the proposed permit area, was defined as the area in which covered activities would occur, impacts would be evaluated, and a conservation strategy would be implemented. The boundary of the Plan area is based on political, ecological, and hydrologic factors.

Covered Species

The Plan is expected to address 35 listed and non-listed wildlife and plant species. The list of proposed covered species may change as the planning process progresses; species may be added or removed as more is learned about the nature of covered activities and their impact in the Plan area. Table 1 lists the proposed covered species and their current listing status.

Covered Activities

The purpose of the Plan is to contribute to the conservation of covered species while streamlining endangered species permitting for covered activities in the proposed Plan area. The JPA and Local Partners intend to request incidental take authorization for covered species that could be affected by three general categories of covered activities: (1) permanent development; (2) operation, maintenance, and other ongoing activities; and (3) implementation of the Plan's conservation strategy. Permanent development could include land conversion, public and private infrastructure, and new facilities associated with agricultural and livestock production. Examples of public infrastructure include, but are not limited to, roadways, bridges, utilities (e.g., natural gas), solar and wind power generation facilities, and water conveyance (including flood control). Operation, maintenance, and other ongoing activities could include operation and maintenance of permanent development described above as well as the operation and maintenance of recreational and mining facilities, and agricultural operations and processing. Implementation of the Plan's conservation strategy could include preservation, restoration, creation, enhancement, management, and monitoring activities.

Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report

The JPA and the Service will prepare a joint document in compliance with CEQA and NEPA. The JPA will be responsible for the scope and content of the document for CEQA purposes, and the Service will be responsible for the scope and content of the document for NEPA purposes. The EIS/EIR will consider the proposed action (issuance of ESA permits) and a reasonable range of alternatives. A detailed description of the proposed action and alternatives will be included in the EIS/EIR. It is anticipated that several alternatives will be developed, which may include alternatives that vary by the level of conservation, impacts caused by the proposed activities, permit area, covered species, or a combination of these factors. The EIS/EIR is anticipated to address potentially significant direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts and beneficial effects on the following environmental issues: aesthetics, agricultural resources, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology/soils, greenhouse gases/climate change, hazards/hazardous materials, hydrology/water quality, land use/planning, mineral resources, noise, population/housing, public services, recreation/open space, socioeconomics, environmental justice, traffic/transportation, and utilities/service systems.

For potentially significant impacts, the EIS/EIR will identify mitigation measures where feasible to reduce these impacts to a level below significance.

Public Involvement

Public Scoping Meetings

Two public scoping meetings have been scheduled to provide an overview of the Plan and obtain written and/or oral comments on the scope and content of the EIS/EIR. The meetings will be held on:

November 7, 2011 from 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

November 7, 2011 from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Both scoping meetings will be held at the City of West Sacramento City Hall in the Galleria, 1110 West Capitol Avenue, West Sacramento.

Persons needing reasonable accommodations in order to attend and participate in one of the public meetings should contact Maria Wong at (530) 406-4885 as soon as possible. In order to allow sufficient time to process requests, please call no later than 1 week before the public meeting.

Submitting Comments

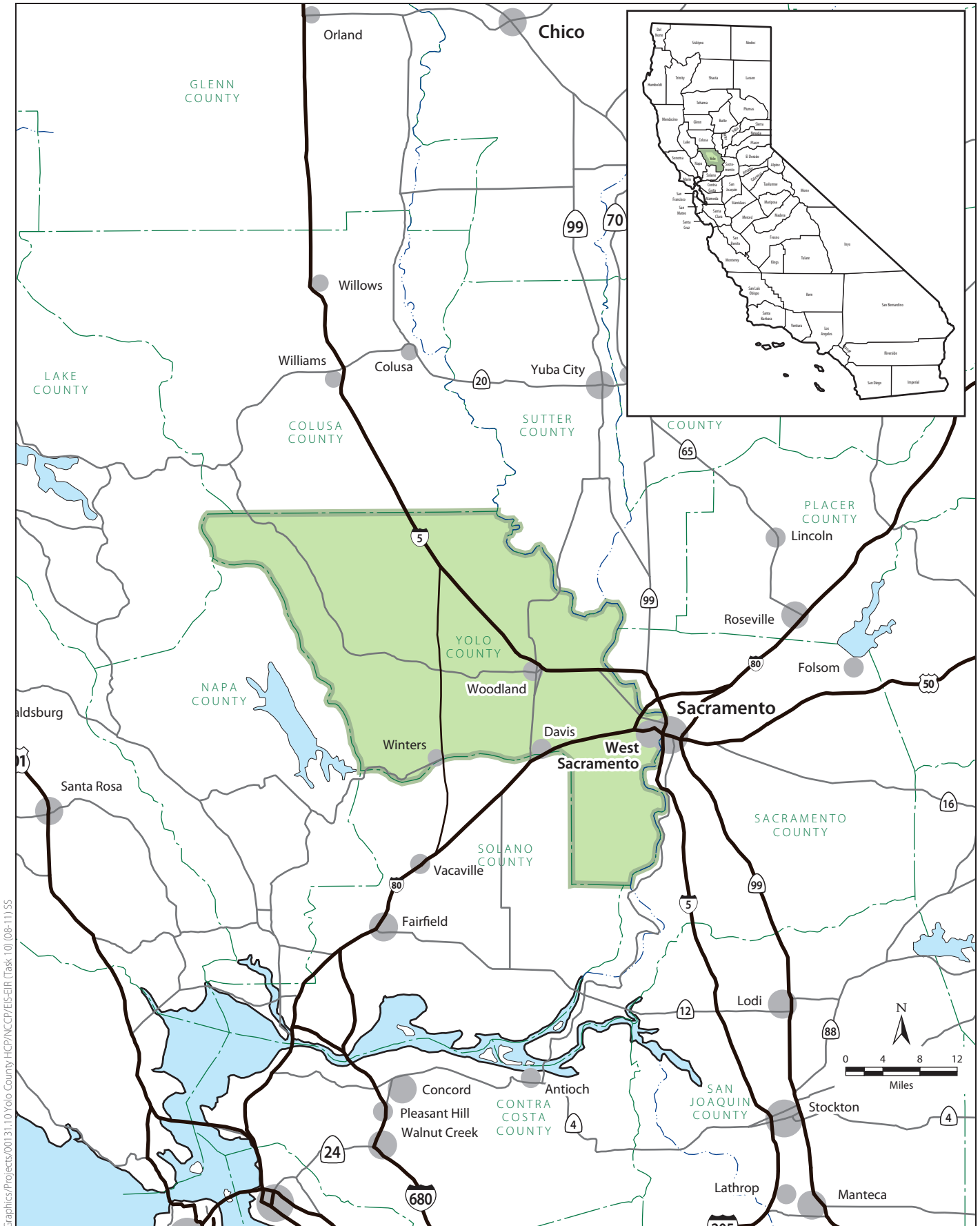
Please send written comments on or before December 5, 2011. Written comments regarding the scope of the EIS/EIR are invited from interested parties to ensure that the full range of environmental issues related to the proposed action is identified and evaluated. All comments received, including names and addresses of commenters, will become part of the official administrative record and will be made available to the public. Information, written comments, or questions related to the preparation of the EIS/EIR should be received on or before December 5, 2011. Written comments should be directed to:

Maria Wong, Executive Director
Yolo County JPA
120 West Main Street, Suite C
Woodland, CA 95695
Fax: (530) 668-1801
Email: Yolonhp@yolocounty.org

Traveling Kiosk

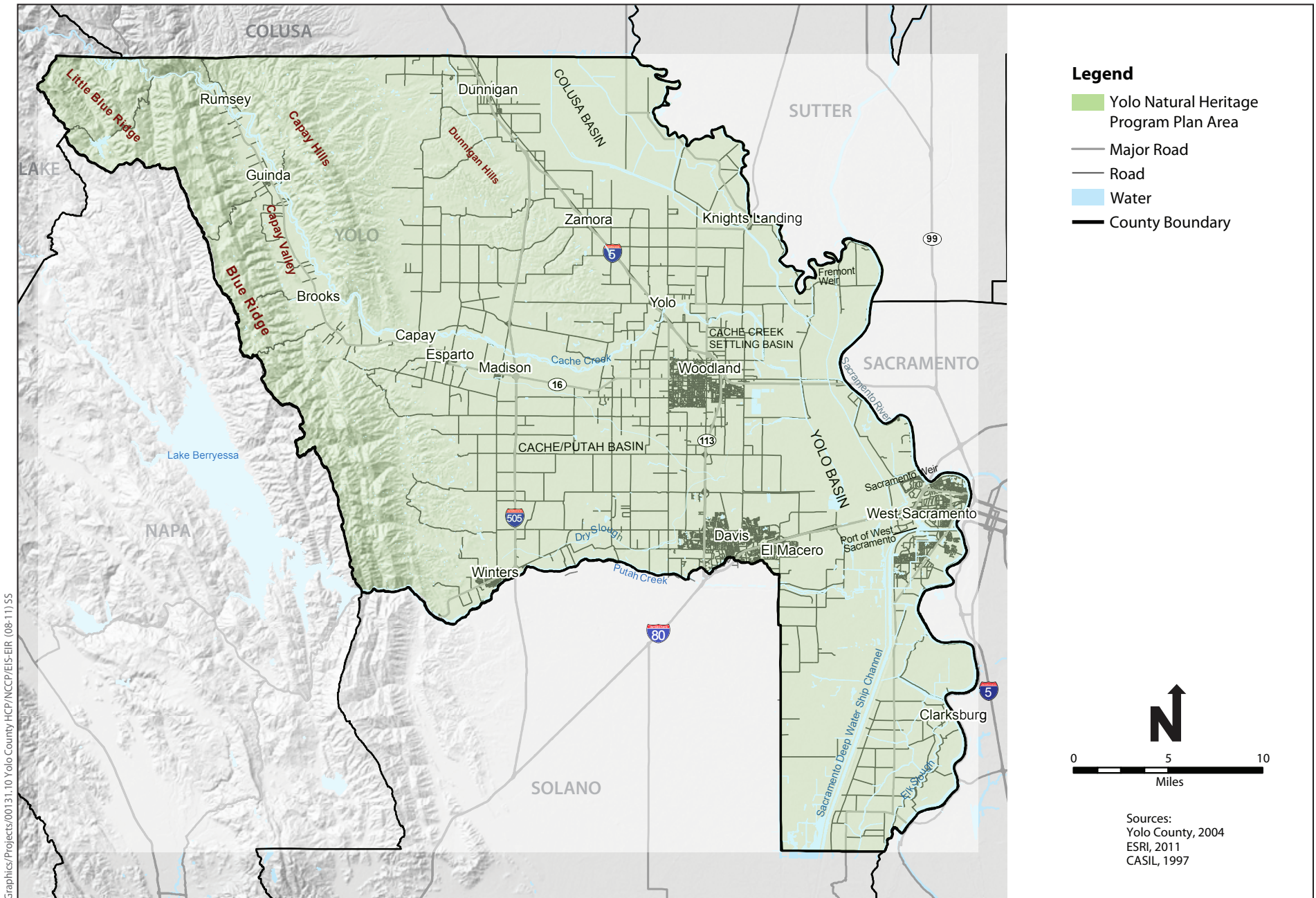
In addition, a traveling information kiosk will be available to the public throughout the 45-day comment period. The kiosk includes a computer station where maps and related information can be viewed and comments can be submitted. A schedule showing locations, dates, and times to view the kiosk can be found at <http://www.yoloconservationplan.org/kiosk>.

For additional information regarding the Yolo Natural Heritage Program, please visit the following website: <http://www.yoloconservationplan.org>.



Graphics/Projects/001.31.10.Yolo County HCP/ANCCP/EIS-EIR (Task 1.0) (08-11) SS

Figure 1
Regional Location



Graphics/Projects/00131.10 Yolo County HCP/NCCP/EIS-ER (08-11).SS

Figure 2
Yolo Natural Heritage Program Plan Area

Table 1. Covered Species under the Yolo NHP and Their Listing Status

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status ^a Federal/State/Other
Plants		
1 Alkali milkvetch	<i>Astragalus tener</i> var. <i>tener</i>	-/-/1B
2 Brittle scale	<i>Atriplex depressa</i>	-/-/1B
3 San Joaquin spearscale	<i>Atriplex joaquiniana</i>	-/-/1B
4 Palmate-bracted bird's-beak	<i>Cordylanthus palmatus</i>	E/E/1B
5 Heckard's pepper-grass	<i>Lepidium latipes</i> var. <i>heckardii</i>	-/-/1B
6 Baker's navarretia	<i>Navarretia leucocephala</i> ssp. <i>bakeri</i>	-/-/1B
7 Colusa grass	<i>Neostapfia colusana</i>	T/E/1B
8 Solano grass	<i>Tuctoria mucronata</i>	E/E/1B
Invertebrates		
9 Conservancy fairy shrimp	<i>Branchinecta conservatio</i>	E/-/-
10 Vernal pool fairy shrimp	<i>Branchinecta lynchi</i>	T/-/-
11 Midvalley fairy shrimp	<i>Branchinecta mesovallensis</i>	-/-/-
12 California linderiella	<i>Linderiella occidentalis</i>	-/-/-
13 Vernal pool tadpole shrimp	<i>Lepidurus packardii</i>	E/-/-
14 Valley elderberry longhorn beetle	<i>Desmocerus californicus dimorphus</i>	T/-/-
Amphibians		
15 California tiger salamander	<i>Ambystoma californiense</i>	T/T/-
16 Western spadefoot toad	<i>Spea hammondi</i>	-/CSC/-
17 California red-legged frog	<i>Rana draytonii</i>	T/CSC/-
18 Foothill yellow-legged frog	<i>Rana boylei</i>	-/CSC/-
Reptiles		
19 Western pond turtle	<i>Actinemys marmorata</i>	-/CSC/-
20 Giant garter snake	<i>Thamnophis gigas</i>	T/T/-
Birds		
21 Swainson's hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	-/T/-
22 Northern harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	-/CSC/-
23 White-tailed kite	<i>Elanus leucurus</i>	-/FP/-
24 Mountain plover	<i>Charadrius montanus</i>	PT/CSC/-
25 Black tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	-/CSC/-
26 Western yellow-billed cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus occidentalis</i>	C/E/-
27 Western burrowing owl	<i>Athene cunicularia hypugaea</i>	-/CSC/-
28 Loggerhead shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	-/CSC/-
29 Least Bell's vireo	<i>Vireo bellii pusillus</i>	E/E/-
30 Purple martin	<i>Progne subis</i>	-/CSC/-
31 Bank swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	-/T/-
32 Yellow-breasted chat	<i>Icteria virens</i>	-/CSC/-
33 Grasshopper sparrow	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>	-/CSC/-
34 Tricolored blackbird	<i>Agelaius tricolor</i>	-/CSC/-
Mammals		
35 Townsend's big-eared bat	<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>	-/CSC/-

^a Status:

Federal

E = listed as endangered under ESA.
T = listed as threatened under ESA.
PT = proposed for listing as threatened under ESA.
C = candidate for listing under ESA.

California Native Plant Society (CNPS)

1B = rare or endangered in California and elsewhere.

State

E = listed as endangered under CESA.
T = listed as threatened under CESA.
CSC = California species of special concern.
FP = fully protected under the California Fish and Game Code.