

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program
Steering Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
February 23, 2009**

Action Items

- Schedule meetings of the Agricultural Interface Working Group
- Arrange presentation from BDCP.

Summary

1. Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 p.m. by John Hopkins

2. Introductions and Welcome

All those present introduced themselves.

Attendees:

Steering Committee Members

Keith Fichtner, Development
Vinton Hawkins, Sierra Holdings
Glen Holstein, CNPS/Tuleyome
John Hopkins, Institute for Ecological Health
Kent Lang, Farmer
Yvonne LeMaitre, Wild Oak Farms
Stefan Lorenzato, Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District
Chad Roberts, Yolo Audubon
Mike Hall, Conaway Ranch

JPA Member Agency Staff and Liaisons

Rick Landon, Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner
Mitch Sears, City of Davis
Dave Shpak, City of West Sacramento
Dan Sokolow, City of Woodland
Warren Westrup, Yolo County Parks and Resources

JPA Staff

Maria Wong, Executive Director
Susan Garbini, Student Intern
Dan Airola, Airola Environmental Consulting
Paul Cylinder, SAIC

Interested Parties

Steve Greco, UC Davis
Rick Landon, Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner
Betsy Marchand, Rumsey Rancheria
George Phillips, Conaway Ranch

Catherine Portman, Burrowing Owl Preservation Society
Jim Quinn, UC Davis
Denise Sagara, Yolo County Farm Bureau

3. Approval of agenda order

It was agreed upon to skip item #4 (approval of 1-26-09 meeting summary).

4. Meeting Summaries and Action Items

The meeting summary will be sent out later this week.

Action Items

- The Willow Slough Study is available. It is a large document, so those wishing to receive a copy by e-mail should notify Susan.
- The field trip to Chickahominy Creek restoration project will be scheduled for a Friday afternoon once it stops raining and the ground dries out.
- Working Groups have met (see item #7)
- Future SAC meetings are scheduled through June
- Schedule for completion of the draft plan is in preparation
- Links to other HCPs/NCCPs in the region have been sent to SAC members
- A presentation on the Bay Delta Conservation Plan is tentatively scheduled for the SAC meeting on March 23.

5. Discussion and SAC approval of revisions to the draft covered species list [See handouts]

Dan Airola reviewed the process for developing the draft Covered Species list (which is described in detail in Agenda Item 5; list was also a hand-out). Assumptions underlying the process were based on the two major goals of the project: (1) achieving conservation for the covered species and (2) obtaining “regulatory relief” from actions affecting listed and endangered species. The previously established set of criteria for selecting species were employed in the process, This resulted in identification of 69 species.

It was presumed that there needed to be an objective process for making selections. This included (1) looking at the criteria and judging whether each candidate species met all criteria; (2) reviewing comments and recommendations from the agencies (Fish & Wildlife Service and Department of Fish and Game) about whether to retain or delete a species; (3) reapplying criteria to all the species (69+), and (4) comparing the outcome of our evaluation with that of the agencies.

Consultants met with the YNHP Biological Working Group prior to completing the list. They recommended including some additional plant species on the list – these have been added.

Some of the 7 criteria proposed by the agencies were eliminated, e.g. “feasibility of conserving species,” cost of implementation of a strategy,” and “cost of a strategy.” In the end, we used 4 criteria for our evaluation. We also disagreed with some of their depictions of geographic range and some of their generalizations regarding “listing potential.” At the urging of the Biological Working Group, we were “conservative,” i.e. we were relatively inclusive in considering whether species were likely to be listed in the future based on information from the California Native Plant Society.

The agencies tend to contradict some of their own publications, for example, in “bird species of Special Concern,” published by the DFG, they state that a number of species are “highly likely to be listed in the future.” The agencies also tend to take a narrow view of “covered activities.” We haven’t fully identified all of them and the magnitude of their effects in the future.

The draft Bay Delta Conservation Plan is not included in our considerations, although they have “goals and objectives” for “upland species” and claim to be interested in coordination with county planning efforts. So far, such coordination has not, in fact, occurred. It is premature for any species to drop out of our plan based on assumption about BDCP.

Regarding the criterion for “adequacy of information” about a species, we assumed that we would have enough information if a species were selected.

The agencies are concerned only about species that require authorization for take. It is possible that we could have a plan that includes species not listed by the federal government or the state, but which we decide are important species to Yolo County.

We want to make sure we have a process in place that will be applicable for the long-term horizon of the plan, i.e. 50 years (even though this time frame may not be granted). We want to extend our plan beyond the current County General Plan in any case.

However, covering many species incurs more costs for the plan and also may delay approval. We need to achieve a balance. A plan with lots of “extra” species may make it difficult for the agencies to justify expenditures for staff and other resources.

The take home message is that the species list is an iterative process and we need to stay flexible. It is highly possible that we will come back with a more limited list in order to adjust to the “reality” of what is required to get timely approval and affordable implementation.

DISCUSSION

Some proposed that it is better to include all species of concern in the plan, but divide them into two groups: those requiring incidental take permits and others. The benefits of a plan that is inclusive are that there are assurances that the rules are “frozen” regarding expectations and costs for these species in the future, should they be listed. For the moment, we have only removed six species. But the agencies are concerned about the large number of species proposed in our draft list.

They claim that the NCCP “natural community” umbrella will cover species that might be left off the list. But the JPA would not have the same responsibilities and commitments in this case. The NCCP Act has as standard for species; it has no standard for “biological communities.” Protection is driven by the needs of species.

Another venue of protection may come through the County General Plan. But there are not models for applying this approach and there are risks associated with it. There is the possibility that the General Plan will not be completely implemented because of lack of funding and there is the risk that protection will change with political changes. Also, the General Plan does not provide the advantages of the “incidental take” “no surprises” process in the future for agriculture.

What is the purpose of our plan? What about other, additional species that are not likely to be listed, but which are of local concern? Do we want to address them in our HCP? There is a risk that the agencies will not accept our plan or will delay approval because of staff and resource limitations if we include too many species.

Other approaches are available for a “second” list – these species could be excluded from the agency approval process.

There are a variety of approaches to determining how to protect species. “Oak woodland” is one of our covered “communities.” But we may need to also identify “keystone,” “umbrella,” or “indicator” species to use in planning: i.e. for setting metrics and parameters and identifying ecosystem functions. These are not species that we want to protect, but that we need to monitor.

Thus, we might envision three categories of species:

1. Covered species
2. Additional species of local concern
3. Planning species

The oak titmouse definitely needs to be included in the list, however.

It is risky to rely on the General Plan for protection, because they do not incur legal requirements unless the county agrees to bind itself. However, such protection will always be subject to political changes and availability of funding.

There are advantages to including species in the HCP/NCCP because these dollars can be leveraged with state and federal funds (unlike dollars in the General Plan).

We haven't yet seen the NCCP assessment criteria but will be meeting to establish an approach, parameters, and metrics for oak woodland, riparian, and agricultural habitat.

We will also meet with the agencies about rating agricultural activities in terms of habitat. The receptivity to the idea of treating agricultural lands as habitat is variable among the agency staff.

Assurance was given that the strategy will be brought back to the SAC for approval, as well as an outline prior to writing the chapter on conservation strategy.

Question: When will we start wrestling with funding requirements for implementation of the plan?

Response: We have an agricultural economist as part of the project staff (Dave Sunderling) and economic considerations will be infused into the planning process throughout. Some potential funding sources include money from developers, which will then be leveraged with state and federal grant money. We also will look for other grants and perhaps will ask voters to support some of the costs if they value “quality of life” issues represented by the plan.

First we need to know how much it costs and in order to know that, we have to draft a conservation strategy. Costs are divided into mitigation impacts (usually paid for by local funds) and recovery costs (state/federal funds).

Yolo County’s strategy is different from others in that the agricultural landscape is a vital part of the habitat planning. Some land will be acquired “in fee,” some through easements, incentives, NRCS. This approach embodies a new way of looking at landscapes

6. Staff Presentation regarding SACOG/ACOE Six County Aquatic Resource Inventory Project **[See handout]**

The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is working on an inventory of aquatic resources in the six-county SACOG planning area, which includes Yolo County (see details in handout for agenda item 5). The YNHP has been asked to participate, along with each of the HCP efforts in the five other counties.

This is a good opportunity for partnering. We also would be able to add a CWA sec 401-404 permitting process onto our HCP.

The risk is that we don’t want to become the “habitat reservoir” for mitigation of activities from other areas without any funding to pay for the additional costs to the county.

It is better to be included in the conversation at the planning stage so that we can shape the outcome. The request from the Project is for data that already exists. Committee members were requested to contact Maria about any new data that is not available in the published documents and sources with information about how to retrieve this information.

7. Working Group Updates

- *Biological Working Group*

The biological working group met on February 11 and went over the draft list of covered species with Dan Airola. The group went through the list species by species and made decisions about which ones to include and which to exclude.

They will meet on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. in the Small Conference Room at the Davis Branch of the Yolo County Library.

- *Agricultural Habitat Interface Working Group*

The Agricultural Habitat Interface Working Group met on February 12 and discussed a variety of strategies for dealing with aquatic resources in Yolo County. They focused on the expectations for changes in flooding due to global climate change and what will happen with agriculture in Yolo County in a diminished growing season with regard to habitat, revenue stream, and other concerns. The Flood District is seeking to determine appropriate strategies for flood control under GCC scenarios that entail more severe events, reduced water supply, and changing patterns of flooding. The goal is to develop a win/win situation e.g. rangeland restoration of native grasses, leading to better water retention and other hydrological benefits. They urge BDCP to look beyond the Delta and Bypass for solutions to their requirements. It is important to include understanding of what comes into the Bypass from the outside.

In this context, the comment was made that the Yolo Basin needs more attention from Sacramento and that the BDCP plans for inundation of this area need to include a better understanding of the hydrology and habitat for species other than fish.

We will have a presentation from BDCP at a future meeting. It is important for us to maintain an interface between our plan and the BDCP plan.

The Agricultural Interface Working Group will be contacted by staff to set up a schedule for future meetings.

- *Urban Habitat Interface Working Group*

The Urban Habitat interface Working Group met on February 9. They were asked to review a summary table on “covered activities” for the county and to provide any missing information on public works planned for the county (and cities). The next step is to capture the spatial information for these projects (GIS digital information), which is key to impact analysis and determination of mitigation needs.

This working group will meet on an as-needed basis.

8. Public Comment

No public comments.

9. Announcements and Updates

Stefan Lorenzato: The renovation and repair work at the Capay Dam is scheduled for this fall. It is posted on the Water District website and will be publicly noticed as well.

10. Summary and Next Steps

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee will be held on Monday, March 9, 2009, in the Blanchard Conference Room, at the Davis Branch, Yolo Public Library.

12. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 pm.