

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program  
Steering Advisory Committee  
Meeting Summary  
July 13, 2009**

**Action Items**

- Confirm schedule for Biological Working Group meetings.

**Summary**

**1. Call Meeting to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 4:10 p.m. by John Hopkins

**2. Introductions and Welcome**

All those present introduced themselves.

*Attendees:*

**Steering Committee Members**

Dan Efseaff, Yolo County RCD

Keith Fichtner, Development

Vinton Hawkins, Sierra Holdings

Glen Holstein, California Native Plant Society

John Hopkins, Institute for Ecological Health

Stefan Lorenzato, Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

Chad Roberts, Yolo Audubon Society

**JPA Member Agency Staff and Liaisons**

Cindy Norris, 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

Jim Estep, SAIC

**Interested Parties**

Julia Camp, ICF

Tovey Giezentanner, Conaway Ranch

Karla Nemeth, California Natural Resources Agency/BDCP

York Ng, member of the public

Lynnel Pollock, Cache Creek Conservancy

### 3. Approval of agenda order

The order of the agenda was approved.

### 4. Meeting Summaries and Action Items

The Committee reviewed the May 11 and June 22, 2009 meeting summaries. They were approved with no changes.

#### Action Items

**The following action items from the May 11 and June 22 meeting summaries were discussed:**

*May 11, 2009*

- The Agricultural Habitat Interface Working Group will review county programs and projects that relate to the ag/riparian and ag/oak woodland interface to ensure communication with our plan.

*This is an item to be discussed at the upcoming Ag Working Group meeting.*

*June 22, 2009*

- Arrange for presentation to SAC on Bay Delta Conservation Plan. [done]
- Confirm schedule for Biological Working Group meetings.

*Dan Airola will create a schedule of items to roll out to the Biological Working Group, the larger group, etc. The regular meeting times for this group are the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month at 3 p.m. Location TBD.*

### 5. Presentation on Bay Delta Conservation Plan – Karla Nemeth, Public Outreach Coordinator, BDCP [see ppt handout]

The purpose of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) is to provide for the conservation of threatened and endangered fish species in the Delta and improve the reliability of the water supply system. The potential permittees for the plan are the Department of Water Resources and the Bureau of Reclamation.

The covered aquatic species include Delta smelt, Longfin smelt, Chinook salmon, green and white sturgeon, Central Valley steelhead, the Sacramento splittail and other terrestrial species. The pelagic fish particularly are in decline due to a number of factors and the biological goals and objectives of the BDCP is to create conditions that will ensure survival and fitness for these at-risk species. Some of the stressors are contaminants, predation effects, barriers to fish passage, disease, invasion of non-natives, and overharvesting. Conservation actions are aimed at improving water quality, decreasing potential for entrainment, and creating optimal water flow and habitat conditions.

The BDCP is heavily focused on aquatic species at present, but the plan is to include terrestrial species to ensure that the plan is “in sync” with other adjacent and overlapping habitat conservation plans for terrestrial species (including the YNHP).

The BDCP preliminary conceptual plan embraces a dual conveyance system that will restore more of an east-west flow pattern with new diversion points and relieve the reverse flow pattern in the Central Delta and the Sacramento River. In order to be successful, the plan needs to make assumptions about other critical elements of California water planning and identify conveyance systems and flow patterns, e.g. dual conveyance, bypass flows, inpass flows.

Habitat restoration is focused on flood plains, tidal marsh areas, and channel margins (riparian habitat). The goal is to achieve habitat conservation, protection, and enhancement for terrestrial species. The plan for the floodplain enhancement in the Yolo Bypass/Fremont Weir is intended to create conditions for additional flooding to obtain anticipated fish benefits, such as the ability to export food down the system. Other potential measures under consideration in the Yolo Bypass include working with the Lower Yolo Bypass Planning Forum. Their recommendations will be published shortly, but are essentially the actions described in the Department of Fish & Game management plan for the Wildlife Area. Ideas about how to phase in 3000-6000 cfs inundation are under consideration.

The BDCP seeks to interface with adjacent HCP and NCCP planning efforts to

- define terrestrial and wetland communities
- assess the range of potential impacts
- develop terrestrial goals and objectives for a conservation strategy
- ensure that the BDCP is complementary to other plans
- identify areas of opportunity with other planning efforts.

The Preliminary Draft Conservation Strategy is expected to be ready around July 31, 2009 with the final Conservation Plan in June 2010.

#### *Discussion*

Q: There are concerns that some terrestrial species have been left out, e.g. the grasshopper sparrow, which has nesting habitat in the Yolo Bypass.

*Reply:* The list of covered species is in process for the BDCP. The list has evolved and will change again. The Department of Fish & Game is reviewing the list to determine whether changes are needed. The grasshopper sparrow is not currently a covered species.

Q: What about plans to increase the amount of flooding – won't this create a dangerous flood situation? Are levees going to be improved?

*Reply:* The goal of proposed increased flooding is more frequent, longer duration flooding “events” to create more opportunity for habitat creation, but the height and size of the events will be the same as now.

Q: Have decisions been made or are a variety of options on the table?

*Reply:* Options are still on the table, but they have been narrowed to a suite of designs for examination. We are getting close – need to get a strategy that will result in recovery of fish species so that permitting can proceed. Trade-offs are being examined and analyzed.

The main purpose of the Yolo Bypass is for flood control. Nothing may diminish the capacity to achieve this goal under existing US Army Corps of Engineering mandates.

Q: Will consistent flooding without a drying-out period affect the viability and survivability of some of the ancient grasses in the area?

*Reply:* The area will still dry out – flooding will still be temporary and a relatively brief period during the year. Some of the actions will result in functional benefits for some species and less benefits to others.

Q: We really need to see the details of plans for “riparian enhancement” and “restoration.” With regard to landscape modification, we will want to have more input on terrestrial animals and habitats and the potential impacts of flooding.

*Reply:* Riparian habitat will be recovered on 5,000 acres of restored tidal habitat (e.g. Liberty Island, the Cache Slough area). Some restoration would happen naturally with flooding.

Q: FloodSafe Yolo is looking at some of these areas and issues. Maybe mitigation will take place elsewhere for the Delta. Has serious consideration been given to increasing the flows on the west side as well as the east side of the Bypass? Does the plan envision an increase in the amount of acreage that is flooded?

*Reply:* The enhancement of the flood plain is focused on the Weir – through the Weir, over the gates. Need slow moving, shallow water for awhile to create fish habitat. We have to determine the benefits for BDCP’s goals and objectives. Proposals are being looked at by the engineering group at DWR. Increase in acreage of flooded area has not been proposed; however, berming of areas to protect habitat, removing areas that could “pond” and strand fish, and a structure to get water out of the toe drain are envisioned.

Q: There is particular concern about vernal pools. Some of the restoration will have significant negative impacts on terrestrial species. How will the BDCP do the mitigation for these impacts?

*Reply:* An effort will be made to achieve common goals for species that overlap with adjacent planning areas. There is an opportunity to restore some basin and wetland conditions that were lost over the past century (e.g. tule marshes restoration). We need to determine if, how, and which changes would affect BDCP’s goals and objectives.

Q: A lot of the changes will have impacts below the Fremont Weir, yet outside the planning area, e.g. Suisun Marsh. There is a lot of sediment deposited below the Weir – won’t this be a management problem? What about the water supply issue? Where will water come from? There is not much unallocated water available.

*Reply:* These are management “challenges”. There will be no pumping to achieve the flooding goals – it is opportunistic – only when the flows are there. The Cache Slough complex restoration area is mostly in Solano County. There are opportunities for habitat expansion for Delta smelt.

Regarding mitigation, there is money available from various sources, primarily from water users.

Q: What about the EIR/EIS? Is there a preliminary price tag/cost estimate for the Fremont Weir modifications?

*Reply:* The EIR/EIS is happening concurrently, but it is a couple of months behind the rest of the planning process. The cost estimates are being prepared.

#### *Discussion*

Q: Are we going to create a conservation network? What about practices for the rest of the landscape?

A: We will focus on creating a set of practices that will use the entire landscape for habitat conservation. The preserve system is likely to be interconnected in terms of conservation functions. The intervening working landscape would not be covered by the plan in terms of covered activities, but it still would have to be compatible with the plan. There are different types of landscapes, different categories of land ownership, so that we would need different land management categories. The term “preserve system” is meant loosely. “Conservation lands” may be a better term.

### **6. Discussion of report: Implications of the Proposed BDCP Fremont Weir Modifications for the YNHP.** Jim Estep, SAIC

TAIC completed an analysis of the implications of the proposed BDCP Fremont Weir modifications on our planning process. The BDCP’s plan has changed a bit, but is essentially the same as when this analysis was undertaken. It will be overlaid on the work our consultant team has done. The goal is to identify areas where there might be overlap or conflict between goals of the two plans based on projected scenarios.

Q: There is concern that some of the important species are not being included , e.g. the grasshopper sparrow. Also, how as the mercury issue been treated?

*Reply:* It isn’t clear whether the grasshopper sparrow fulfills the criteria for covered species. A stakeholder group was formed to look at EPA TMDL standards for mercury. Because of the budget crisis, the group lost funding so that the stakeholder process has been modified. BDCP has a conservation measure to address methyl mercury issues. It is not a major issue relative to fish. The measure is focused on supporting the State Water Board’s physical habitat restoration requirements.

Q: Will BDCP strive to get the best benefit for everyone in the plans for increased flooding?

*Reply:* We are considering an “inbetween” scenario (i.e. 4500 cfs). The purpose is to give flexibility to adaptively manage, using the least water possible.

Q: Is there a process for deciding whether to drop a species? Given the BDCP effort, do we have enough habitat to provide assurances for some of the covered species, e.g. the giant garter snake? Perhaps we could come up with a plan together to enhance habitat for a particular species. Can we rely on the BDCP to provide habitat for some species?

*Reply:* We are working on this strategy. The relationship between the two plans could have a cumulative effect. We will look at the total landscape and joint solutions would be factored incorporating benefits from each plan. BDCP sits at the center of many counties with planning efforts underway – we must coordinate on the overlapping areas.

Some species are very marginal to the Delta; some overlap. We are talking about how to get synergistic outcomes. It is a complicated process for a variety of reasons, including that each plan must be developed to stand alone, in case the other plans are not approved or implemented.

Q: There are a number of significant missing species, e.g. vernal pool crustaceans in the Yolo Bypass. Also some mammals are left out, e.g. the San Joaquin pocket mouse. These are neglected in both plans.

Are BDP mitigation requirements likely to change Yolo County's landscape pattern? What is the magnitude of mitigation? Where is it going to take place?

*Reply:* We are talking about critical areas for both plans. There is an opportunity for Yolo County to contribute to positive fish outcomes and for the BDCP to contribute to Yolo critical areas. Recovery standards on overlapping areas need to be developed so that resources can be leveraged between the two plans.

Q: There are a number of sediment issues in the Settling Basin – what about life after the Settling Basin (about 25 years are left) – have alternatives been considered in the plan?

## **7. Working Group Updates**

- *Biological Working Group*

The Biological Working Group hasn't met for awhile. They are in the process of setting a schedule for regular meetings and what the focus should be. Their regular meetings are scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays, place TBD.

- *Agricultural Habitat Interface Working Group*

The Agricultural Habitat Interface Working Group has been working on a matrix of “covered actions” or “covered activities” related to agricultural operations. They first developed a set of lists for agricultural activities, operations, and lands and a table with general headings and subcategories. A template table has now been prepared for each crop type to indicate the timing of specific agricultural activities (i.e. summer, fall, winter, spring) and will be filled in by working group members over the next few weeks.

A draft table is in preparation on activities related to storm water and flood control, including water-related public infrastructure. T

The Ag Working Group meets regularly on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays of each month from 3:30 – 5:00 p.m. at the Conference Room in the Department of Parks and Resources, 120 W. Main St., Suite C, Woodland. The next meeting of the Ag Interface Working Group will be held on Wednesday, July 15.

- *Urban Habitat Interface Working Group*

The Urban Habitat interface Working Group met on February 9. Members have provided feedback and updates to lists of potential “Covered Activities” --- planned projects for each City and the County (including rural areas) for inclusion in the Yolo Natural Heritage Program habitat conservation plan.

This working group will set a schedule of meetings soon.

## **8. Public Comment**

None

## **9. Announcements and Updates**

- The Capay Dam Project will be in the permitting phase this fall, with development of a bed package.
- A draft ordinance is being developed requiring management plans and permits for wetland restoration projects over a certain size.
- YNHP will have an exhibit at the Yolo County Fair (August 19-23), which will include an interactive computer element at our kiosk. The exhibit will later travel around the County and will be a way for the public to learn about the YNHP. Volunteers are needed to staff the exhibit during the fair.
- Community outreach meetings are planned to get underway soon.
- The wildlife agencies have been unable to participate in our meetings due to budget and staffing issues. We are in contact with them and they assure us that they will be here at the critical stage in our process.

## **9. Summary and Next Steps**

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee is scheduled for Monday, July 27, 2009, at 6:00 p.m. at a meeting place in Woodland to be determined. We expect to hold most of our meetings at the Yolo County Administration Building for the foreseeable future, due to logistical issues with other meeting locations. The JPA will meet on August 3.

## **10. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m.