

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program
Steering Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
July 27, 2009**

Action Items

- Sign up to serve at the Yolo County Fair YNHP kiosk.

Summary

1. Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:10 p.m. by John Hopkins

2. Introductions and Welcome

All those present introduced themselves.

Attendees:

Steering Committee Members

Dan Efseaff, Yolo County RCD

Mike Hall, Conaway Ranch

Vinton Hawkins, Sierra Holdings

John Hopkins, Institute for Ecological Health

Stefan Lorenzato, Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

JPA Member Agency Staff and Liaisons

Warren Westrup, Yolo County Parks and Resources

JPA Staff

Maria Wong, Executive Director

Susan Garbini, Student Intern

Dan Airola, Airola Environmental Consulting

Jim Estep, SAIC

Interested Parties

Peter Balfour, ECORP Consulting

Steve Greco, UC Davis

Kent Smith, Department of Fish & Game

3. Approval of agenda order

The order of the agenda was approved.

4. Meeting Summary and Action Items

The Committee reviewed the July 13 meeting summary and approved it with no changes.

Action Items

The following action item from the July 13 meeting summary was discussed:

- Confirm schedule for Biological Working Group meetings.

The Biological Working Group will meet on Wednesday, August 12, 2:30 - 4:00 p.m., at the Department of Fish & Game Conference Room in the Yolo Basin Wildlife Area. Future meetings will be held at this location on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month. The regular meeting time is still to be determined.

5. Updates on Conservation Goals; Upland Conservation Strategy; and Agricultural Forecasting Analysis – Dan Airola, SAIC, [see ppt handouts]

Conservation Goals

Work is underway to complete the goals section of the YNHP plan. Conservation goals include goals for ecosystems and for covered species. Various scales are used throughout the plan for different purposes, including a county-wide, landscape unit, and planning area scale. Species' goals are on both a countywide and planning unit scale.

Ecosystem goals are difficult to establish in cases where information about specific species is limited. The approach used is criteria-based, which leads to a system or priority ratings.

There are currently 64 species covered by the plan (although this number may change). Goals are quantified as percent of the existing habitat acreage that is used by species for various essential activities (e.g. breeding, feeding, resting, etc.) to create "habitat units."

The criteria used for setting goals are based on:

- Listing status under the Endangered Species Act
- Evaluation of the population/habitat trend
- Importance of habitat within Yolo County to regional and statewide populations
- Degree to which habitat is a limiting factor
- Rarity of the particular habitat in Yolo County

Goals are then refined based on the proportion of suitable habitat actually used by species and the evaluation of the results of the Conservation Strategy Alternatives model. Individual rationales are prepared to describe the basis for goal setting for each species.

Species goals are then used for evaluating Conservation Strategy approaches. A detailed evaluation of this strategy will be reviewed by the Biological Working Group.

Discussion

Q: How will the plan integrate beyond the county boundary?

Reply: We have considered how important the habitat within Yolo County is to the species and then will define connections with other areas outside the county, e.g. to Napa County in the Blue Ridge, or habitat for the garter snake in the Natomas area. We need to focus on habitat management within our area, but stay linked to planning activities in adjacent areas.

Q: How would the planning for a species related to a population that crossed over into another County, e.g. a population one either side of the Sacramento River?

Reply: We would have make sure we communicate to organizations with responsibilities for wildlife management in that area.

Q: What about “natural community” habitat?

Reply: In SB 107, protection of species is the dominant concern; however, there is an embrace of the community as context for the species as well.

Q: How do we accommodate future needs that might be different than they are now, e.g. shifting landscape, climate change? How can we ensure that we have a conservation strategy that is effective into the future? Have we anticipated these shifts in devising our strategy and process?

Reply: Our expectations for future changes are included in the strategy, including shifts in habitat, run-out of elevation and soils as you move species upslope in response to changing climates and disturbance regimes. The key element is flexible preserve design as compared with “hard” preserve design. The focus is on the target requirements, not on specific land or areas.

Q: Can you depend on certain crops to be grown in the future? Global markets change; climate change may also make it impossible to grow the crops that we have now.

Reply: We have done a lot of thinking about these factors, and, again the focus is on the function that the crops serve for species, not on the particular crop.

Upland Conservation Strategy

The conservation strategy for the Upland Landscape unit has been revised, but is still in development. We have developed draft assembly rules and designated three alternatives based on the rules and on a conservation planning model, called “Marxan”.

["Marxan is a software program used to support the design of marine and terrestrial protected areas. Using Marxan, conservation planners can identify an efficient system of conservation sites that include a suite of biodiversity targets at a minimal cost. Marxan provides a unique method for designing reserves that is systematic and repeatable."]

The three alternatives include different maximum levels of land conservation for mountain and hill planning units and set preservation goals for achieving habitat value for a variety of species. The maximum will maintain voluntary landowner participation and flexibility in lands acquisition.

The uplands strategy involves incorporation of uplands within the agricultural matrix based on the following approach:

- Identify larger units of grassland
- Incorporate vernal pools and alkali grasslands
- Examine species occurrences, ownerships
- Incorporate adjacent agricultural land for buffer or restoration opportunities.

Strategy for Uplands within the agricultural matrix:

- Few uplands areas are present
- They are often associated with other protected lands (e.g. Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, Russell Ranch)
- The same conservation lands are incorporated into all the alternatives

Some habitat types are more rare, e.g. serpentine, closed cone pine, cypress, mixed chaparral, and will receive special attention.

The initial alternatives evaluation will assess the attainment of species goals for each alternative, particularly what percent of total non-agricultural habitat goals are attained by the alternatives. Based on the results, a variety of options are available:

- Reassess the goals
- Some ability to substitute agricultural lands for uplands
- Focus on habitat quality (through management strategies) rather than on quantity
- Add more grassland acreage

Another option is to reevaluate whether the species should be included in the plan.

Discussion

Q: An examination of the density of small remnant habitat is crucial – they need to be incorporated into larger preserves (e.g. one oak tree or restoration project in a field).

Reply: Yes, it is often a question of whether they can be knit together to serve as prey reservoirs. We are not discounting them, but may be using an incentive-based strategy to preserve them rather than a preservation strategy.

Q: Won't these classifications affect land values and lead to increases in asking price? How will we set priorities?

Reply: Areas more likely to be developed will have a higher priority.

Q: Is there a minimum amount of habitat that needs to be preserved to ensure species viability or survival?

Reply: We use assembly rules; design a conservation strategy; test to determine how well it meets the goals for the species.

Q: How do we determine what it takes for a species to be “self-sustaining” and how much is “enough.”

Reply: We look at the species; examine historical trends to select the most likely lands for achieving the goals.

It was decided to delay the presentation on “Agricultural Forecasting Analysis” to the next meeting (August 10, 2009).

6. 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 next meeting will be on Wednesday, August 12, 2:30-4:00 pm, in the Department of Fish & Game Conference Room in the Yolo Basin Wildlife Area. Future meetings will be held at this location on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month. The regular meeting time is still to be determined.

- *Agricultural Habitat Interface Working Group*

The Agricultural Habitat Interface Working Group is nearing completion of a matrix of "covered actions" or "covered activities" related to agricultural operations. A table has now been prepared for each crop type to indicate the timing of specific agricultural activities (i.e. summer, fall, winter, spring)

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

The next meeting of the Ag Interface Working Group will be held on Wednesday, July 15, from 3:30 – 5:00 pm, in the Conference Room at the Department of Parks and Resources, 120 W. Main St., Suite C, Woodland.

- *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 start meeting again in the fall.

7. Public Comment

None

8. Announcements and Updates

- A group is starting up under the DWR to develop a Central Valley Flood Plan for Big Rivers. They will form a number of working groups and are calling for volunteers to serve on the groups. See the DWR "FloodSafe" webpage: <http://www.water.ca.gov/floodsafe/> for information about the working groups and instructions on how to apply for membership.
- 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.

9. Summary and Next Steps

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee is scheduled for Monday, August 10, 2009, at 4:00 p.m. in the Atrium Training Room, at the Yolo County Administration Building, located at 625 Court Street, Woodland.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.