

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program
Steering Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
August 10, 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

Keith Fichtner, Development

Mike Hall, Conaway Ranch

Vinton Hawkins, Sierra Holdings

Glen Holstein, California Native Plant Society

John Hopkins, Institute for Ecological Health

Kent Lang, Yolo County Farmer

Stefan Lorenzato, Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

Chad Roberts, Yolo Audubon Society

JPA Member Agency Staff and Liaisons

Rick Landon, Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner

Cindy Norris, City of Woodland

Warren Westrup, Yolo County Parks and Resources

John Young, Yolo Agricultural Commissioner

JPA Staff

Maria Wong, Executive Director

Susan Garbini, Student Intern

Dan Airola, Airola Environmental Consulting

Paul Cylinder, SAIC

Interested Parties

Steve Greco, UC Davis

George Phillips, Conaway Ranch

Catherine Portman, Burrowing Owl Preservation Society

3. Approval of agenda order

The order of the agenda was approved.

4. Meeting Summaries and Action Items

The Committee will review the July 27, 2009 meeting summary at the next meeting.

Action Items

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

A sign-up sheet was passed around. Members are requested to let Susan know of their availability by Wednesday, August 19.

5. Presentation on Agricultural Forecasting Analysis – *Dan Airola, SAIC [see ppt handout]*

This presentation describes how we are dealing with agricultural habitat in the plan. It explains the factors we use to forecast the implications for wildlife species of various uses of agricultural land and the value of different crops as habitat. The goal is to implement a program that demonstrates the compatibility of agriculture with habitat conservation and to determine how well the system is working now and to plan for the future.

The habitat value of crop lands are evaluated based on “habitat units”, which are determined according to a formula, evaluated for different habitat uses by different species (e.g. foraging, breeding, etc.), and accumulated for each species across all crops. The goal is to achieve a certain percentage of habitat value in the county and to model probabilities of changes from one crop to another from year to year.

The habitat value does not depend completely on acreage, but on a combination of functionality and acreage. The timing of the crop is also important and is rated in terms of value as functional habitat for a particular species times the number of acres. Some of the categories are broader; some are more refined. The models are based on individual species’ accounts.

A key aspect of the analysis is to compare habitat units produced with the goals that have been identified for a species (i.e. percentage of baseline habitat value).

The model was developed using a 1-year snapshot; the baseline is modified over time to reflect an average condition. Crop average forecasts are based on the “best expectation”. Forecasting estimates the likelihood that habitat goals for covered species will be met without intervention.

The key implications of the model are as follows:

- Habitat availability fluctuates
- Goals are generally met without intervention
- Fluctuations cause goals not to be met in some years, exceeded in others
- Species have resiliency historically

Options for species whose goals are not met include

- Incorporating substitutes for the primary habitat through agricultural habitat
- Determine if there is “excess” value in other areas (e.g. riparian or upland)

- Develop land management strategies (e.g. reconfigure ditches, provide residual cover, specify certain crop uses)

The question is whether we are comfortable with this as a tool and support it as a part of the conservation strategy.

Discussion

Q: Why not use more years of data to build higher confidence in the models? There is good data in paper format.

Reply: The first year of good data available was 1989, but had gaps. We needed to have confidence in the data sources. The first year of GIS tracking was 2005. Earlier data were related to pesticide use. The forecast is not the plan. The purpose is to be alerted when changes are affecting habitat so one can intervene. The forecast is simply a tool to use to track habitat values over time and to determine whether intervention is needed.

Q: There is good data in a paper format.

Reply: We would like to get that data and use it in the model.

Q: Does this model include any adjustment for climate change?

Reply: We are a long way off from introducing information on global climate change into the model, but the model is adaptable to new information.

Comment: You should have a demonstration of the potential for incorporating change into the model; for example, demonstrate the amount of future change that might take place – perform a sensitivity analysis. This analysis is projecting forward based on existing patterns, but we need to determine if the model can accommodate changes.

Comment: If you leave one of the crops types out, how does that affect the model? For example, what about the interaction between crop type and riparian system? How does this affect the ability to provide for habitat functions?

Comment: Political “earthquakes” may be the most serious factors that can affect this: loss of the Williamson Act, conversion to aquatic habitat from the BDCP, etc.

Q: What would happen to various species if alfalfa was no longer grown in the County?

Reply: It is difficult for economists to make predictions at a specific field level, but they can look at broader trends. We would probably have advance notice of this kind of trend, so that adjustments could be made to ensure habitat value.

Q: Is this model able to look at consequences of applying a practice to a crop type, e.g. adding hedgerows to alfalfa fields? The acreage by itself frequently is not enough – the management practices also are crucial.

Q: Does the model support limiting the number of species covered in the plan? Does it point to which ones definitely need to be supported?

Reply: If we think we're taking the species, then we want it covered. Perhaps some species will be shown to be less important, however. The Fish & Wildlife Service is looking at how likely it is that species will be covered in the future.

Comments: The Biological Working Group didn't agree with some of the views of the FWS. This is a good model. It is good at point out which species are more critical. However it is a good idea to have all the species included because political changes will likely change the probability of a species being listed in the future. You can have species in the plan for which you do not need take permits.

What are the practices that could or should be added that enhance the habitat value? Can we "incentivize" ag practices? And by increments? Also of importance is the location of land with respect to other habitat.

Q: Is written documentation of the model available? We need to learn more about it in order to believe, understand, and bless this model! It would also be helpful to work through examples to be comfortable with the assumptions. There are a number of hidden relationships that need to be discussed, e.g. what are the requirements for being certified organic? Are pollinators providing enhanced biodiversity on the farm? What other factors might contribute to achieving our habitat goals?

Reply: We will arrange a meeting of those who are interested in learning more about the details of the model with our consultants in the next few weeks. An e-mail will be sent out to find out who would like to participate.

6. Working Group Updates

- *Biological Working Group*

The Biological Working Group will meet 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.

- *Agriculture-Habitat Interface Working Group*

The YNHP Agricultural Interface Working Group had a series of organizational meetings in August and September 2008 to define the group's purpose, processes for interacting, and establish guidelines for creating work products. The group started holding regular meetings on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of each month in February 2009 and has been meeting regularly since then. They have accomplished a number of specific tasks, including the following:

- Developed a list of agricultural activities and practices for use in the YNHP plan "covered activities" along with definitions of the terms
- Developed a summary of the infrastructure component of agricultural activities and practices

- Developed tables for the major categories of crops in Yolo County that list categories (and sub-categories) of agricultural activities and practices and their seasonal timing.
- Developed a table of “Covered Activities for Water Supply and Flood Control”

These tasks are nearly completed and are in review by the Ag WG members. They will be available for use in the habitat conservation plan as appropriate.

The group has also raised some ag-related issues for further exploration in relation to habitat planning and implementation and will address these after a short “vacation” in August and September, when they reconvene in the fall.

- *Urban Habitat Interface Working Group*

The Urban Habitat interface Working Group will resume meeting again in the fall. The chief item on their agenda will be issues of implementation and governance related to the plan.

7. Public Comment

The DWR’s FloodSafe Stewardship Working Group is meeting. They will develop and review information for Central Valley flood planning and submit a draft plan for public comment. Stefan and John are both members of the working group. Comments can be made through the website: <http://www.water.ca.gov/floodsafe/>,

8. Announcements and Updates

The RFP (Request for Proposal) for the EIR/EIS (Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement) is in final review at the Fish & Wildlife Service and will go out later this week if approved. We have identified five firms with CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) and NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) experience, as well as experience with HCP/NCCPs. The final selection will be submitted to the JPA Board for a fast turn-around. We would like to have a contract by mid-October.

The BDCP (Bay Delta Conservation Plan) has released an administration draft of their Conservation Strategy chapter. It can be found on-line at their website (<http://resources.ca.gov/bdcp/>). Comments can be made directly to BDCP or through Maria.

We plan to have collaborative sessions to coordinate the two plans.

The State has released a report: Draft Climate Adaptation Strategy: <http://www.climatechange.ca.gov/adaptation/>

We will have a kiosk and interactive exhibit at the Yolo County Fair (August 19-23) and need volunteers to help us staff the table, especially in the evenings and on the week-end.

The first edition of the YNHP newsletter is going out this week by e-mail. Ideas and articles are welcome for upcoming editions. We hope to send out a newsletter bimonthly as part of our outreach program.

9. Summary and Next Steps

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee is scheduled for Monday, August 24, 2009, at 6:00 p.m. in the Atrium Training Room, at the Yolo County Administration Building, located at 625 Court Street, Woodland.

A draft Pollinator Conservation Strategy will be available for review and discussion.

We expect to present Chapter 2: "Existing Conditions" for discussion at the next meeting (Aug. 24). We will ask for comments in writing by September 1. Chapter 3: "Covered Activities" will be ready in early September.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:58 p.m.