

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program
Steering Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
August 24, 2009**

1. Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. by Maria Wong.

2. Introductions and Welcome

All those present introduced themselves.

Attendees:

Steering Committee Members

Dan Efseaff, Yolo RCD
Keith Fichtner, Development
Vinton Hawkins, Sierra Holdings
Glen Holstein, California Native Plant Society
Kent Lang, Yolo County Farmer
Yvonne LeMaitre, Yolo County Farm Bureau
Chad Roberts, Yolo Audubon Society

JPA Member Agency Staff and Liaisons

Rick Landon, Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner
Dave Shpak, City of West Sacramento
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
Jim Estep, SAIC

Interested Parties

Judy Boshovon, Yolo Land Trust
Steve Greco, UC Davis
George Phillips, Conaway Ranch

3. Approval of agenda order

The order of the agenda was approved.

4. Meeting Summaries and Action Items

The Committee approved the July 27, and August 10, 2009 meeting summaries with no changes.

5. Presentation and initial discussion of draft Chapter 2: “Existing Ecological Conditions”

Dan Airola, SAIC [see ppt handout]

The major sections of this chapter include the following:

- Physical characteristics
- Historic natural communities
- Existing natural communities and habitats
- Covered species
- Potential effects of climate change

The classification scheme has been discussed with the Biological Working Group and is pretty well set. Four natural communities and six landscape units are delineated, along with 28 habitats, 104 vegetation types, and 65 covered species. Species accounts and their distribution are nearly completed. The classification system is incorporated into the species-habitat models and is the basis for developing conservation measures for impact analysis.

The process for selecting species and the list of species have previously been presented to the SAC and the Biological Working Group.

The climate change section is at present only a general introduction of effects on physical processes, communities, species, and agriculture, but will be further expanded.

A GIS database was developed and used to delineate physical conditions, including

- Soils
- Land cover mapping
- Vegetation cover
- Species habitat models
- Impact analysis

Because our plan is also a “natural communities conservation plan” (in addition to a habitat conservation plan), we are also concerned with targeting unique natural communities for protection.

Discussion

Q Could historical vegetation information be included on the website, even if not in the plan?

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Reply: It can be used to identify sites with potential for restoration. We can focus on that for the riparian strategy (to be discussed below).

Q: What about soils information?

Reply: This information is available on line. The point is to provide description of conditions as a “set up” for planning. It is not intended to be a comprehensive source of information. It is better to refer or point to the source data for additional information, rather than to include all of it in the plan.

Q: Anything germane to restoration planning needs to be included

Reply: This information is more likely to be included in the riparian restoration sections.

Q: Historical data could be useful for understanding relative proportions of distribution of habitat.

Reply: The working landscape of today is providing habitat for species. We are trying to improve or restore existing landscape to past conditions to foster more habitat.

6. Progress report on development of draft Riparian Conservation Strategy

Dan Airola and Jim Estep, SAIC [see ppt handout]

The riparian conservation strategy has lagged behind other components of the plan. Additional progress has now been made, however. The steps involved in completing this include

- 1) Incorporate existing information that has already been assembled.
- 2) Focus on major riparian systems

We need to identify gaps in riparian corridors for restoration and enhancement, as well as identify desired riparian conditions for ecosystem functions and covered species. Finally, we need to identify measures for management of riparian areas within upland conservation areas and encourage compatible management for these various systems.

The components of the riparian conservation strategy include:

- Preservation of riparian areas that are large components of major existing habitats
- Enhancement through removal of invasive species and augmentation of diversity (e.g. shrubs and early successional species, and pollinator habitat)
- Restoration and creation of habitat
 - To fill gaps in corridors
 - To incorporate into flood control and water supply programs
- Devise appropriate regulatory protection
 - Avoid too much prescriptive actions
 - Allow flexibility to the implementing entity to achieve desired goals

Recent activities include the following

- Summarized existing riparian protection plans
- Developed a draft "Assembly Rules" to identify key conservation lands
- Developed a classification system of riparian-channel types based on
 - Watershed size
 - Water sources, regimes, and uses
- Identified specific riparian protection and enhancement strategies

[see table: "Riparian-Channel Types and Conservation Options"]

Types of habitat can be quantified based on GIS features.

Discussion

Q: Where does the Yolo Bypass fit in?

R: Some areas of wetlands (larger areas) may be reassembled with other categories. In this case, the functional classification typology would be joined with specific geographic areas. We will base the goals in geographic areas, defining what we want to achieve in a specific geographic area.

Comment: Many of the major sloughs are influenced by tailwater rather than irrigation. The trend is to move away from practices that produce substantial tailwater. We need to be careful not to build our plan on dependence on continuation of these practices.

Comment: The relation and connectivity between riparian and upland needs to be encouraged.

Reply: We have revised the landscape units into a more useful set of consolidated divisions that are more helpful to the plan, as follows:

- Upland
- Riparian
- Valley natural communities [*new*]
 - Valley oak woodland (non-riparian) [*new*]
 - Vernal pools/alkali waters
 - Lowland grassland
 - Emergent and saline wetlands
- Agriculture

Remnant patches will be described one at a time.

For example, valley oak woodland conservation measures

- Emphasize groves, but also isolated trees (heritage)
- Roadside protection (roads and utility O&M)
- Evaluate stands of high conservation value based on
 - Stand size
 - Intact, diverse
 - Enhanceable (unencumbered by incompatible uses)
 - New plantings of stands, isolated trees

Comment: These will have to interconnect with other planning efforts.

Response: We have to develop an implementation plan. We can then be able to better use our limited resources in the most efficient way. We will be seeking a consensus on the different strategies.

Comment: Note that other kinds of habitat are outside this frame, e.g. eucalyptus, roadside walnuts. Hybrid walnuts may provide the same function as native walnuts, but we should take the opportunity to plant native species where possible. Valley oaks in Yolo County may be

genetically unique. What will climate change do to the valley oaks? We may want to plant them in new locations.

Comment. What about Dry Slough? It is a large stream, like Willow Slough. It would help a network of riparian landscape across the county. It needs to be incorporated as a major system.

Q: What about Sacramento River levees?

Reply: These are beyond the scope of our plan when it involves the Army Corps of Engineers jurisdiction and fish species not covered by our plan.*

Q: What about FloodSafe Yolo? How will this plan accommodate change going forward?

Reply: It depends on whether these are “covered activities” and it also depends on how the framework and goals relate to actual activities.

Other activities in the county could also contribute to achieving our conservation goals. The team is attempting to aggregate “covered activities” listed by various agencies into a common list. Some projects will have implications for endangered species, but not all will be under “covered activities.” The next chapter will focus on this topic.

Q: How will we gather information on how other organizations can help us meet our goals and become partners in this endeavor? We will need to reconcile priority areas, contiguous areas, etc.

Reply: We are already interacting with the Bay Conservation Development Plan to ensure that we are communicating about common concerns and identifying potential for sharing responsibilities in achieving common goals in overlapping or adjacent areas. Issues and opportunities need to be sorted out, especially along the Sacramento River (on the land side).

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7. Procedures for submitting comments on draft work products

A Review Document Comment Form has been developed and comments should be made on the form based on the line number in each draft chapter. Instructions for submitting comments are on the form. All comments will be compiled into a single comprehensive comment form by page number.

Subsequent chapters will build on previous chapters, so it is important to be timely in providing comments. This preliminary review will be followed by a public review.

Can we give the team a green light on the riparian strategy? We will have 2 weeks for comments.

Q: What about a strategy for valley natural communities?

Response: Some of it has already been discussed. We need to pull it together, also wetland strategy.

* Since this meeting, discussions have been held to clarify that Sacramento River levees will be included as appropriate in our planning process.

8. Working Group Updates

- *Biological Working Group*

The Biological Working Group met on Wednesday, August 12, and reviewed conservation goals and strategies for species. We will continue this discussion on August 26 and have 2-3 more meetings.

Comments: Plants have gotten shortshrifed compared to birds in the plan, especially alkali wetland and vernal pool plants. We need 100 per cent protection of these specific and small areas.

- *Agricultural-Habitat Interface Working Group*

The Agricultural Working Group is finishing up lists of agricultural activities and practices based on seasonal timing. These will be transmitted to Maria for use in the plan.

- *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.

9. Public Comment

Steve_Greco has found DWR land use data in GIS format on crop dynamics in Yolo County for 1989 and 1993. This would provide a longer time horizon to the analysis. There is also data going back to 19612 and through the 1970s on microfilm and paper.

10. Announcements and Updates

We will be setting up a meeting with Dave Sunding for a presentation on the detailed components of the statistical model for evaluating agriculture as habitat. This will be a Webex presentation and will be open to all who are interested in getting more details of the model. Dr. Sunding will make a general presentation on the model at a later date.

Our first newsletter has been distributed widely. We now need to start working on the next issue and would appreciate images, items of interest on topics related to our concerns.

The Northern California Planning Partners HCP Workshop will be held on November 18 in Vacaville. Registration information will be sent out as soon as it is available. The Yolo Land Trust is having a "Day in the Country" fundraiser and celebration on September 13 at the Walnut Ranch on the Sacramento River. Information can be found in our newsletter or on the Yolo Land Trust website.

The Yolo County General Plan is due to be adopted on September 29.

11. Summary and Next Steps

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee is scheduled for Monday, September 14, at 4:00 p.m. in the Atrium Training Room, at the Yolo County Administration Building, located at 625 Court Street, Woodland.

We expect to present Chapter 3: "Covered Activities" for discussion along with continuing discussion of the riparian strategy.

12. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.