

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program
Steering Advisory Committee
Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop
Meeting Summary
October 26, 2009**

Action Items

- Provide a map that shows the various types of water courses in Yolo County.
- We can provide a “crosswalk” that shows how the Yolo Natural Heritage Program (NHP) classification system compares to other classifications.
- Clarify the definition of “woody riparian habitat.”
- Revisit the definition of “riparian.”
- Additions to the draft references list as received.
- Consolidate the “Constraints, Opportunities, and Outcomes” List.
- Provide an outline for directed discussion at the next meeting.

1. Welcome, Introductions, Agenda Review, Meeting Objectives, and Meeting Approach

The meeting was called to order at 5:40 p.m. by Steering Advisory Chair, John Hopkins and Yolo NHP Executive Director, Maria Wong. The order of the agenda was approved. This is the first of several (3-4) planned meetings to develop a shared understanding about riparian conservation in Yolo County as part of the habitat conservation plan, as well as to institute a process for ensuring continued public participation throughout the remainder of the planning process. The conservation strategy for the Yolo NHP is in the early stages and there is still an opportunity for input by the public and stakeholders.

Attendees and staff introduced themselves and were welcomed. Attendees were as follows:

Bruce Boyd
City of Davis

Scott Clemons
Riparian Habitat Joint Venture

Craig Denisoff
Westervelt

Libby Earthman
Putah Creek Council

Jim Etters
Yocha deHe Wintun Nation

Steve Greco
UC Davis

Phil Hogan
USDA NRCS

Glen Holstein**
California Native Plant Society/Tuleyome

John Hopkins**
Northern California Conservation Planning Partners

Chris Lee
Yolo County Board of Supervisors, Dist. 2

Chris Lee
Solano County Water Agency

Yvonne LeMaitre**
Yolo County Farm Bureau

Stefan Lorenzato**
Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

Betsy Marchand
Yocha deHe Wintun Nation

Jon O'Brien
Audubon California

Tim O'Halloran
Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

Eric Parfrey
Yolo County Planning

George Phillips
Conaway Ranch

Emily Reeves
Yocha deHe Wintun Nation

Kent Reeves
Yolo County Parks & Resources

Chad Roberts*
Yolo Audubon/Tuleyome

Bob Schneider
Tuleyome

Eric Vink
Trust for Public Land

Jeanette Wrysinski
Yolo County Resource Conservation District

John Young
Yolo County Agriculture Department

Jay Ziegler
Ziegler Associates

** Member, YNHP Steering Advisory Committee

2. Approve Steering Advisory Committee Meeting Summaries

In addition to the workshop, this meeting is part of the Steering Advisory Committee's regular meeting series. The minutes of the SAC meetings on 8/24/09 and 9/14/09 were discussed and approved with minor changes.

3. Presentations

Paul Cylinder and Dan Airola, SAIC [see ppt handout at the following link: http://www.yoloconservationplan.org/yolo_pdfs/steering/steering-2009/2009-10-26-presentation-riparian-strategy.pdf]

- Riparian conservation in the context of the Yolo County HCP/NCCP
- Yolo County riparian baseline conditions and data sources

Paul Cylinder and Dan Airola, consultants to the YNHP, explained that the Yolo Natural Heritage Program is a habitat conservation /natural communities conservation plan (HCP/NCCP) that operates under federal and state programs (the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish & Game) to develop conservation plans for threatened and endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). It is more than a mitigation plan, and has a focus on preserving ecosystems and natural communities on which species depend.

There are a number of components of the Yolo County plan, and the riparian conservation strategy will be integrated with other parts of the plan. Riparian communities are present in more than one landscape area throughout the county and are particularly important for providing a variety of functions essential to species conservation (e.g. nutrient retention, water quality, processing of nitrogen in the soil, etc.).

Drafts of the first three chapters of the Yolo NHP ("Introduction," "Existing Conditions," and "Covered Activities") are available on our webpage (www.yoloconservationplan.org), along with a comment form. We request that your comments and suggestions be submitted using this form. Since the plan is moving forward on a schedule, early comments are appreciated.

Some of the species covered in the Yolo HCP are fully dependent on the existence of healthy riparian habitat, e.g. rose mallow, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, foothill yellow-legged frog, western yellow-billed cuckoo, bank swallow. Riparian areas are key to some other covered species use riparian for certain life history needs, but also depend on other habitats, such as Swainson's hawk and the yellow-billed magpie that nest in riparian but forage elsewhere, and roosting use by the western red bat.

Four distinct "landscape units" have been identified as a basis for conservation planning in Yolo County [see map in PPT handout]:[†]

- Uplands (hills and mountain areas)
- Valley natural communities (non-riparian "natural" communities on valley floor)
- Woody riparian (upland and lowland)
- Agricultural (+ urban)

In addition, 21 geographically distinct “planning units” have been designated, each containing lands with similar characteristics. [See maps in PPT for delineation of these areas].

QUESTION: Are aquatic habitats included in the plan?

RESPONSE: Aquatic habitat is included in relation to terrestrial species that rely on such habitat (e.g. tiger salamander), but aquatic species are not included in the Yolo HCP.

COMMENT: We have initiated conversations with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding permits for a regional inventory for wetlands (SACOG – Wetland Inventory Process).

A watercourse classification (and extent) system has been developed with the following categories: Major streams, large sloughs, tidal influenced sloughs, large channels, small foothill streams, small valley floor streams and channels, small high elevation streams, and Cache Creek settling basin channels.

We can provide a map that indicates the various types of water courses.*

QUESTION: Are all the included streams permanent? Does this include irrigation canals?

RESPONSE: Watercourses with both permanent and intermittent flows are incorporated, including natural and artificial watercourses. Field ditches constructed annually for irrigation are not included.

QUESTION: Does the plan include Yolo Basin areas and the 5-step restoration program (e.g. the Tule Canal project)?

RESPONSE: This has not yet been decided. We have to prioritize our efforts because our financial resources are limited.

RIPARIAN HABITAT CLASSIFICATION

The riparian habitat is classified based on a hierarchical classification system as follows:

- Natural community: riparian and wetlands
- Habitat: Valley foothill riparian
- Vegetation type: 10 types are recognized

Vegetation types and numbers of acres are found on a table in the ppt handout (“Woody Riparian Habitat Classification and Mapping Results”).

QUESTION: Does “woody riparian habitat” have a minimum amount of “wood” associated with it? What percentage or size of acreage must be “woody” to be included?

RESPONSE: Only the woody portion of these areas is included. We can clarify this definition.

QUESTION: How does this approach crosswalk with state, federal, and other (e.g. Riparian Habitat Joint Venture) schemes and definitions?

* Action Item

RESPONSE: Efforts were made to correlate with other systems. We can provide a “crosswalk” that shows how the NHP classification system compares to other classifications.

QUESTION: Vegetation mapping done by TAIC (for the YNHP) a couple of years ago is available and the metadata is available on the YNHP website. Has this information been incorporated into the current effort? Has it been “ground-truthed” or only obtained through remote sensing?

RESPONSE: The vegetation mapping information on the YNHP web site is the vegetation system used in the plan. Much of this information was mapped from aerial imagery through remote sensing (necessary for efficiency and because so much land is private). Some of the data came from other sources (i.e., Napa County mapping effort) and was melded together. Representative areas were ground-truthed (i.e. checked and validated in the field).

QUESTION: What is the definition used for “riparian”: vegetation types, channel morphology, and other approaches are possible. The National Research Council definition of riparian systems is based on function (not vegetation). The Riparian Habitat Joint Venture adopted this definitions. The State Water Resources Control Board is looking at developing a wetlands and riparian policy and will have a definition.

RESPONSE: We will revisit this topic.

RIPARIAN CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The framework for the riparian conservation strategy for the Yolo County HCP is in development. The overall approach is to provide balanced program to protect, enhance, restore, and mitigate habitat for targeted species. The plan takes an ecosystem approach and intends to achieve a level of conservation that is more than a minimum of what is required by the federal and state regulations. The main focus of the wetlands component is to maintain existing values for wetlands. The approach for woody riparian habitat is to protect key areas, enhance this habitat by controlling invasive vegetation, restore areas that provide key connectivity and maximize existing opportunities (such as along sloughs and ditches), and mitigate unavoidable loss.

QUESTION: The piece that is missing is management. How are we going to manage riparian areas?

RESPONSE: We will need to incorporate conservation measures that identify management needs and specify the development of site-specific management plans for acquired conservation lands. The management component must address a 50-year plan through monitoring and adaptive management capabilities.

QUESTION: Are you looking at restoring the historic vegetation patterns (pre-2007)? What is the potential goal or target for improving habitat conditions?

RESPONSE: That’s a big challenge. We are taking an ecosystem function approach. The valley is completely altered by agriculture and development. We are not proposing to return to historic patterns, but will look for opportunities if they are available. We are particularly looking for places where hydrology allows reconnection of riparian areas.

QUESTION: What about riparian habitat as wetlands?

RESPONSE: The bulk of the wetlands acreage is in the Yolo Bypass. About 80 percent of this is in state ownership.

COMMENT: The Cache Creek Resource Management Plan has taken the following approach

- History as a basis for restoration planning (where it can realistically be implemented)
- Look at some specific species, but also at the habitat requirements

QUESTION: What about the expansion of riparian habitat into areas where there is a potential for restoration? An earlier study (Jones & Stokes) showed there was potential in agricultural areas for riparian habitat restoration (e.g. tailwater ponds).

RESPONSE: Tailwater management and associated habitat will be addressed

QUESTION: Will this plan be consistent with state and federal requirements so that we won't have conflicting goals?

RESPONSE: The plan has to be consistent with these requirements.

QUESTION: What about jurisdictional boundaries that affect habitat (e.g. Solano County along Putah Creek, UC Davis).

RESPONSE: We will be communicating with adjacent jurisdictions and working together where needed (e.g. Putah Creek Council and Tuleyome). We have good communication at present with the Bay Delta Conservation Plan and with Solano County's HCP effort. There are many opportunities for cross-linking with our plan.

QUESTION: There are a number of areas in the county where aquatic issues are important, e.g. the Yolo Bypass, Delta mercury TMDL, Yolo Flood Control, BDCP. The reintroduction of anadromous fisheries is an issue in relation to Cache Creek.

RESPONSE: We are aware of these programs and are attempting to integrate them with our planning efforts. Anadromous fish are not covered in the NHP, and conservation measures will not be specifically proposed for them, but many of the measures to be employed for conservation of riparian habitats are expected to provide benefits to fish habitat.

QUESTION: What about the role of other county organizations related to habitat issues?

RESPONSE: The issue of mitigation of agricultural impacts is addressed in county ordinances. This allows for enhancement of riparian habitat along sloughs. Audubon is supporting these activities. Most habitat enhancement activities will be possible through the agricultural part of the county.

COMMENT: The reference list is in draft form. Please send any additional references to Susan and we will provide an updated reference list (susan.garbini@yolocounty.org).

4. Facilitated discussion of opportunities, constraints, and desired outcomes

Maria Wong, YNHP Executive Director

[See Appendix at the end of this summary for the consolidated lists developed at the meeting.]

5. Discussion regarding stakeholder input process

In the interest of time, this topic is tabled for the next workshop.

6. Summary and next steps

First, we need to decide whether we want to continue with these meetings. [General consensus was that we do wish to continue.] Then we need to determine what important stakeholders are not here and how to encourage them to participate. In general, the group expressed concern that agricultural landowners representation was low, and they recognized the need for working with this group.

Please send suggestions for additional attendees to Susan. A working draft version of the Conservation chapter of the plan is on track for December/January, so we need to have the riparian strategy ready as input to that chapter. We also are asked to provide input to the BDCP on our riparian areas and concerns.

COMMENTS

1. It would be helpful to have an outline and directed discussion for the next meeting.

RESPONSE: We will provide an outline for topics to discuss at future workshops based in part on what we have discussed here.

2. Can we delineate the specific riparian area targets?

RESPONSE: We're not ready yet for acres, we first need a strategy. There is sufficient habitat available. The question is where do we want to direct our limited resources based on an assessment of our priorities?

3. The various vegetation types have different habitat value – we need to maximize value.

RESPONSE: These values enter into our planning approach.

7. Announcements and Updates

The Northern California Conservation Planning Partners (NCCPP) is holding the *Seventh Annual Workshop: Habitat Conservation Planning from Tahoe to the Bay* in Vacaville on November 18th. The NCCPP is instituting a set of annual awards for excellence in contributions to habitat conservation planning in Northern California, which will be presented at the Workshop. Nominations are requested for the awards in three categories: Leadership, Outstanding Planning / Implementation Achievement, and Community Involvement. Details about the meeting and the awards can be found at the NCCP website <http://www.conservationplanning.info/>.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

APPENDIX: Constraints, Opportunities, and Desired Outcomes

Yolo Natural Heritage Program Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop 10/26/09

CONSTRAINTS

1. Reduction of the agricultural land base by riparian habitat restoration is a concern for agriculture-dependent Yolo County.
2. Agricultural land values (\$) may impede acquisition for riparian restoration.
3. Trust between private landowners and riparian advocates is essential and not always present.
4. Federal and state funds for conservation are declining, which limits capabilities for action. Clear targets (acreage, species, etc.) are needed to obtain funding. Adequate local staffing is needed to achieve plan goals and objectives.
5. Climate change creates uncertainty about future conditions for planning.
6. Some agricultural owners may be reluctant to accept habitat restoration because they view it as a source of undesirable species.
7. Ownership of agricultural land is likely to be volatile over time and may result in habitat loss due to potential changes in land ownership and use. It is currently difficult for agriculture to stay in business and avoid development of agricultural land.
8. Flood control and water supply needs limit riparian enhancement and management opportunities. Lack of available water and instream flow protection are additional factors constraining riparian habitat..
9. A complex, costly, and bureaucratic plan would be hard to explain to the public and difficult to implement.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. A comprehensive plan offers opportunities to accomplish important long-term objectives for restoring habitat and essential connectivity, preserving agriculture, and protecting species.
2. Public interest in environment and natural resources issues are high in the Central Valley now – especially for water-related issues.
3. Opportunities exist for improving communication to the public and among different stakeholders, and for engaging a broad range of interests and groups, including educating private landowners on the benefits of riparian management and restoration.
4. Private sector funding and involvement is a potential source of support.

5. The Yolo County farm community is generally supportive of habitat and restoration goals. Diverse groups are developing a common vision in the County. The YNHP can be integrated with other related activities in the county, including
 - interest in controlling invasive species and restoring native plants..
 - FloodSAFE Yolo and the IWRMP
 - the Cache Creek Management Plan and other area resource plans
 - other conservation programs (e.g. the Williamson Act).

DESIRED OUTCOMES

1. Incorporate riparian management into agricultural management.
 - Integrate diverse ideas, including inviting landowners to be part of the process.
 - Reduce concerns about harboring and harming listed species, which may be discouraging some landowners from maintaining habitat.
 - Create an incentive-based program.
 - Create a balanced plan between agriculture and species protection; work together so that agriculture can provide food for people and species.
2. Preserve and enhance riparian habitat in Yolo County in a practical, workable and dynamic way.
 - Establish connected corridors.
 - Achieve a connected functional network of natural community types.
 - Integrate aquatic and terrestrial conservation and management efforts.
3. Create a functional description of riparian habitat; establish targets by landscape unit.
4. Incorporate water protection goals
5. Achieve regulatory certainty through the permit process.
6. Make it easier to preserve cultural resources through clear compliance rules.

* The policy in preparing meeting summaries is to produce a record of discussion by all participants. Statements do not necessarily reflect the views of the YNHP Steering Advisory Committee.

† Hand-outs are available from the Events Calendar at www.yoloconservationplan.org.