

Staff Communication

TO: Advisory Steering Committee and Riparian Stakeholders

FROM: Maria Wong
Executive Director

DATE: March 8, 2010

SUBJECT: DRAFT RIPARIAN DEFINITION

Recommended action: That the stakeholder group discuss the proposed language with the goal of reaching consensus regarding a working definition of “riparian” associated with the draft riparian conservation strategy.

Background

The riparian definition subcommittee met and developed the following proposed language. One member of the subcommittee has remaining concerns which they will present to the stakeholder group. The group acknowledged that questions regarding the NHP riparian community classification system exists but agreed to address those concerns as the riparian conservation strategy continues to evolve.

Discussion

The proposed draft riparian definition language follows. It is intended to be a working definition pending final approval of the NCCP.

“Riparian areas are transitional between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and are distinguished by gradients in biophysical conditions, ecological processes, and biota. They are areas through which surface and subsurface hydrology connect water bodies with their adjacent uplands. They include those portions of terrestrial ecosystems that significantly influence exchanges of energy and matter with aquatic ecosystems (i.e., a zone of influence). Riparian areas are adjacent to perennial, intermittent, and ephemeral streams, lakes, and estuarine-marine shorelines.”

[National Research Council, 2002, *Riparian Areas – Functions and Strategies for Management*]

Chad Roberts notes that the NRC definition reflects an emerging consensus among federal and state riparian managers. For instance, the definition has been adopted by the California Riparian Habitat Joint Venture. The implementation of this riparian concept varies among implementing agencies. For example, in November 2009 the US Fish and Wildlife Service commented about the riparian concept:

Riparian is viewed from many perspectives. Gregory et al. (1991) indicates riparian areas are transitional interfaces between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. More classical riparian interpretations identify primarily woody vegetation associated only with lotic systems. Recent interpretations include a broader view involving both lotic and lentic systems, surface and subsurface water influences, and natural forces and human-

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induced activities that affect the woody and emergent vegetation. Riparian areas are closely associated with water and topographic relief; they are not necessarily distinct from either wetland or upland, but exhibit characteristics of both wetland areas and upland areas. Riparian areas lack the amount or duration of water usually present in wetlands, yet their connection to surface or subsurface water distinguishes them from adjacent uplands.

[Modified from "A System for Mapping Riparian Areas In The Western United States"
(URL:

<http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/documents/gOther/SystemMappingRiparianAreasWesternUS2009.pdf>].

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SUBJECT: Stakeholder Preference Exercise

Please review the following Constraints, Opportunities, and Desired Outcomes in advance of the Stakeholder Preference Exercise.

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.