

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program
Steering Advisory Committee
Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop
Meeting Summary
March 8, 2010**

Note: *“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 or the JPA Board of Directors.”*

Action Items

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

The meeting was called to order at 4:10 p.m. by Steering Advisory Chair, John Hopkins, and Yolo NHP Executive Director, Maria Wong. This is the third of four planned workshops on the riparian conservation strategy for the YNHP conservation plan, all of which are convened under the auspices of the YNHP Steering Advisory Committee

The order of the agenda was approved and attendees and staff introduced themselves and were welcomed. [See last page for List of Attendees.]

The overall objective of these workshops is to develop a shared understanding about riparian conservation in Yolo County as part of the habitat conservation plan. The objectives for this meeting include:

- Establish a process for ensuring continued public participation throughout the remainder of the plan development phase.
- Agree on a draft working definition for “riparian”.
- Continue riparian conservation strategy discussion
- Conduct a stakeholder preference exercise using rapid assessment tool.
- Determine the next steps in the process.

2. Approve Meeting Summary for the second Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop

The draft meeting summary for the second Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop, held on 12/14/09, was discussed and approved with no changes.

3. Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop *(continued from December 14, 2009)*

This is the third workshop in a series of 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.

4. Discuss and reach agreement on staff's proposed Stakeholder Input Process

The Process for developing and incorporating stakeholder input in the YNHP riparian conservation strategy is as follows:

FIRST PHASE

- First Workshop (10/26/09)
 - Confirm interest group representation
 - HCP/NCCP orientation
 - Survey of constraints, opportunities and outcomes from stakeholder
- Second Workshop (12/14/09)
 - Review constraints, opportunities, and outcomes
 - Continue to explore riparian stakeholder issues and priorities
 - Discuss "riparian" definition
- Third Workshop (3/8/10)
 - Reach agreement on stakeholder process
 - Reach agreement on riparian definition recommendation
 - Conduct Stakeholder Preference exercise
- Fourth Workshop (TBA)
 - Presentation of Consultant "straw proposal" for riparian conservation strategy
 - Stakeholder discussion and input on straw proposal
 - Develop recommendations to the SAC for presentation to the JPA

SECOND PHASE

This phase will activate during the development of monitoring and adaptive management chapter of the Yolo County habitat conservation plan.

This is a stepwise process.

Question: If we are unable to approve the "straw proposal" in one meeting, perhaps we will need another meeting.

Response: That is possible.

Question: The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) is working on a wetlands and riparian area protection policy, which they expect to have ready in about two years. Once they have formulated their definition of “riparian,” we may need to add requirements to our County plan in order to be consistent.

Response: The State Water Board policy process will be followed by all the HCP/NCCPs, along with other regulatory developments that supersede our plan. We will need to maintain an ongoing understanding of these “super” regulatory agencies in developing and implementing our plan. However, the JPA has indicated the crucial importance of moving forward quickly to obtain a first administrative draft by the end of the year. There will be many opportunities for revision and change at all stages in the process of developing our plan.

5. Discussion and agreement regarding draft “riparian” definition

Presentation “Riparian (and Wetland) Science, by Chad Roberts
[See *ppt handout*]

It is important to understand that the definition of “riparian” is dynamic and may include other areas beyond the stream depending on a number of variables. For example, the extent of a riparian area beyond a stream may be different depending on the degree of “wetness” in the landscape and the “riparian resource” of concern (e.g., riparian areas for water quality are less extensive than are riparian areas for habitat). Rainwater, groundwater, discharge, and base flow are all factors that determine how a riparian area is defined in a particular landscape. Riparian areas tend to be dynamic.

The relationship between riparian and wetland areas is complex and is dependent on function. It is possible to have a wetland within a riparian area. They may be overlapping, but are not mutually exclusive. The aquatic ecosystem includes the stream corridor and adjacent landscapes, where riparian functions extend into the uplands. The ecosystem functions of riparian areas and wetlands are generally as follows:

- Support terrestrial and aquatic habitat and ecosystem (e.g. provide nutrients, energy, and physical habitat).
- Enable trapping of sediment and pollutants, shading, and water quality maintenance.
- Provide flood peak flow, bank stabilization, and erosion control for floodplain.

These functions are typically associated with identified riparian areas (or “buffer” zones) of various widths along the margins of a watercourse. Dimensions of the buffer zones may vary depending on local conditions of the landscape and watercourse. The management of the riparian area is important in determining the degree of protection for the aquatic area’s functions.

The State Water Board definition of a wetland is based on three criteria:

1. It is saturated by ground water or inundated by shallow surface water for a duration sufficient to cause anaerobic conditions.
2. It exhibits hydric substrate conditions indicative a such hydrology.

3. It either lacks vegetation or the vegetation is dominated by hydrophytes.

The State Water Board definition of a riparian area is similar to the definition that our sub-group recommends (from the National Academy of Sciences):

“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*]

This definition has also been adopted by the California Riparian Habitat Joint Venture.

Question: How is the boundary of the “edge” determined?

Response: A boundary is set that incorporates the riparian area – it is arbitrary to some extent. Interactions may not be “symmetrical” (i.e. from the upland to the stream or from the stream to the upland). We may want to determine whether the influence from the water to the upland is more important than the influence of the riparian area on the stream. These may need to be parsed and debated in order to reach agreement.

DISCUSSION

It is important to have data on at least a 2-year cycle in order to obtain an understanding of the watercourse and adjacent riparian areas. We don’t often see the creek at its high flow. It is crucial to determine the ordinary high watermark for understanding and defining the riparian area. A riparian area created from a dam-controlled flow is different from that created through a “natural” flow.

Human actions frequently change the riparian area boundaries. We will have to decide what we recommend for maintaining the riparian area over time.

Some of these upland and riparian transition zones are vague and difficult to delineate, even by experts. Extended boundaries provide flexibility to deal with change over time, e.g. climate change. We need to ensure flexibility in our plan to deal with the inevitable changes that will occur over a 40-50 year time horizon. It is best to avoid locking into a course of action that is unnecessarily rigid.

We could delineate the dimensions of a buffer zone (“x” feet) along the edge of the watercourse and call that the “riparian area.” We can make it wider if appropriate, but would set a minimum (e.g. 100 ft.). The logic in that approach is also related to the fact that the current riparian zone is greatly diminished due to human actions in the past. It would be a good idea to have the potential to expand current riparian areas to accomplish more functionality for ecosystem services in the future.

Question: How does adaptive management apply to our riparian definition and the mapping of riparian areas?

Response: Although there is flexibility in the future through the adaptive management element of our plan, regulatory permitting is incorporated into the plan up front. Issues of financing also come into play. We have to be cautious and practical about committing to protections, since all commitments have a cost. While denoting a larger area is “conservative” from an ecosystem standpoint, it can incur financial responsibility. We can always choose to do more in the future.

Comment: The Putah Creek riparian corridor was many times larger before Monticello Dam was constructed. We can’t restore it to its historical dimensions, but some riparian areas could be widened. It is important to keep these opportunities open in case of willing landowners or public support. An opportunistic definition would keep open the possibility of acquiring additional lands in the future. However, we will not be able to restore riparian habitat in some areas (e.g. Cache Creek South of Hungry Hollow).

The plan also encompasses grassland and oak woodland areas, which provide other opportunities for riparian habitat. All of these could be connected to form a system of riparian habitat.

We should be able to define some areas as clearly riparian, although there may be difficulties in extending buffer zones in an unrealistic manner. We need to avoid putting the burden on landowners to manage their land as riparian habitat. It is better to map existing riparian areas, and create functional corridors that connect riparian areas.

Response: The purpose of the definition is linked to our assembly rules. We are a habitat plan, so we can limit our definition to a “working definition” for the time being. We can improve it over time or get more specific, if needed. This is not a linear process that reaches a conclusion, but is connected to other aspects of the overall plan. It is most important to be flexible and to articulate what is practical and provides the most benefit.

Comment: The Riparian Habitat Joint Venture is creating a riparian habitat map of California. They differentiate between structural and functional mapping and map both. Mapping functional riparian zone delineates opportunity, not necessarily requirements. A number of outcomes are possible through preservation and restoration activities.

Question: What are the effects for a landowner in terms of right of way, adjoining land to a riparian area? What if there is an outbreak of disease or an “act of God” that destroys the riparian area? Who will bear the costs?

Response: The plan builds in provisions to deal with unanticipated events and disasters.

Question: Yolo County has adopted an agreement for the riparian area along Cache Creek (CCRMP) has this been reviewed by the YNHP for consistency with this plan?

Response: For now we assume that approved agreements in the County relevant to habitat and conservation issues and management activities will be incorporated without change into the conservation plan.

SUMMARY

- Riparian is strongly affected by human interactions with these areas.
- These are fairly robust areas, capable of recovery on their own if allowed.

- Concern that an arbitrary buffer zone over a 40-year plan may cause anxiety to landowners about future regulations and/or government interference.
- While flexibility is necessary to achieve realistic goals, it may also be viewed as a way of avoiding responsibility.
- The working definition of riparian can be revisited and revised later if necessary.

The consensus of the group was to accept the recommended definition of “riparian” from the sub-group as a working definition and revisit it later if deemed appropriate.

6. Constraints, Opportunities, and Desired Outcomes/Stakeholder Preference Exercise [See handout for Agenda Item 6]

Comment: In examining our list of “Constraints, Opportunities, and Desired Outcomes,” I notice that we have listed many “constraints” but few “Opportunities.” In fact, the incorporation of a riparian conservation strategy into our habitat conservation plan can provide many additional opportunities for funding that the other components cannot. For example, the next Farm Bill is likely to emphasize riparian habitat. Also, the water legislation that is pending in the State Legislature will almost certainly offer support for activities related to restoring or creating riparian habitat.

Question: What is meant by “desired outcome” #5: “Achieve regulatory certainty through the permit process”?

Response: Permittees under this plan gain protection and benefits in assurances and streamlined permitting process for obtaining Incidental Take Permits for covered activities and for protection from additional requirements if a species is listed in the future.

Question: If a species recovers in the future, will it then be removed from certain requirements?

Response: The plan would have to be amended to remove a species from the conservation plan.

STAKEHOLDER PREFERENCE EXERCISE

Describe?

8. Announcements and Updates

- The YNHP Biological Working Group will meet on Wednesday, March 10 at 1:30 pm.
- The YNHP Agriculture-Habitat Interface Working Group will meet on Wednesday, March 10 at 3:00 pm to review the “Pollinator Conservation Strategy” and prepare a preliminary set of recommendations to the SAC.

- On April 21, a Weed Control Workshop will be held at the Cache Creek Nature preserve.
- The Putah Creek Council is holding a fundraiser on April 10 – they are showing a film: “Rivers of a Lost Coast”
- The Yolo RCD dinner will be held on April 14 at St. Anthony’s Parish Hall. Mace Vaughn will be the keynote speaker.
- Yocha Dehe received a Section 6 grant for restoration activities on Cache Creek, to be managed by the CCNP. This will support removal of invasive plants and revegetation with native plants over three years.
- The Native Plant Greenhouse in Davis has plants for restoration. Contact Rich Marovich and Libby Earthman for additional information.

9. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m. The next SAC meeting will be held on March 22, 2010 at 4:00 pm. The next Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop will be convened once a straw proposal is ready for discussion and review. This is anticipated to happen in the next month. The proposal will be sent out in advance to attendees.

LIST OF ATTENDEES

Jim Baxter*
CSUS/Davis resident

Bruce Boyd
City of Davis

Miles Daprato
Audubon California

Libby Earthman
Putah Creek Council

Keith Fichtner*
Developer

Steve Greco*
UC Davis

Vinton Hawkins*
Sierra Holdings

Phil Hogan
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Glen Holstein*

California Native Plant Society/Tuleyome
John Hopkins*
Northern California Conservation Planning Partners

Chris Lee
Yolo County Board of Supervisors, Dist. 2

Kent Lang*
Yolo County Farmer

Yvonne LeMaitre*
Yolo County Farm Bureau

Stefan Lorenzato*
Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

Rich Marovich
Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee

Lynnel Pollock
Cache Creek Conservancy

Chad Roberts*
Yolo Audubon/Tuleyome

Charles Tyson
Reynier Fund

Warren Westrup
Yolo County Parks & Resources

Sandra White
City of West Sacramento

Jeanette Wrynski*
Yolo County Resource Conservation District

John Young
Yolo County Agriculture Department

YNHP Staff

Maria Wong
Susan Garbini
Kate Montieth

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