

**Yolo Natural Heritage Program
Steering Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
March 22, 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.”*

1. Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m. by YNHP SAC chair, John Hopkins.

2. Introductions and Welcome

All those present introduced themselves.

Attendees:

Steering Committee Members

Steve Greco, UC Davis

Vinton Hawkins, Sierra Holdings

Glen Holstein, CNPS/Tuleyome

John Hopkins, Institute for Ecological Health

Yvonne LeMaitre, Yolo County Farm Bureau

Stefan Lorenzato, Yolo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

Jeannette Wrynski, Yolo RCD

JPA Member Agency Staff and Liaisons

Bruce Boyd, City of Davis

Chris Lee, Yolo County Board of Supervisors

Phil Pogledich, JPA Legal Counsel

Dave Shpak, City of West Sacramento

Warren Westrup, Yolo County Parks and Resources

JPA Staff

Maria Wong, Executive Director

Kate Montieth, Assistant to the Director

Susan Garbini, Graduate Fellow

Dab Airola, Airola Environmental Consulting

Paul Cylinder, SAIC

Jim Estep, Estep Environmental Consulting

Pete Rawlings, SAIC

Interested Parties

John Anderson, Hedgerow Farms

Catherine Portman, Burrowing Owl Preservation Society

JayLee Tuil, UC Davis

Charles Tyson, Yolo County landowner

Kathryn Tyson, Yolo County landowner

Katharina Ullman, UC Davis

Warren Westrup, Yolo County Parks & Resources

3. Approval of agenda order

The order of the agenda was approved.

4. Meeting Summaries and Action Items

The draft meeting summary for the SAC meeting on February 22, 2010, was approved with no changes.

The draft meeting summary for the Riparian Conservation Strategy workshop on March 8 will be available at the next Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop (set for April 19). It is more appropriate for all participants in the workshops to have the opportunity to review those proceedings before preparing a final draft.

Action Items

- The action item from the February 22 SAC meeting was to charge the Agriculture-Habitat Interface Working Group with conducting a preliminary review of the “Pollinator Conservation Strategy” and reporting to the SAC. This has been prepared and will be presented in Agenda Item #5 below.

5. Introduction and discussion regarding the “Pollinator Conservation Strategy”

While pollinators are not covered under the Endangered Species Act, we realized that they are an important asset to growers and that the YNHP could improve the landscape by supporting pollinator habitat. We received a grant from the Department of Fish & Game to develop a pollinator strategy and asked Xerces (an organization dedicated to pollinator conservation) to prepare a plan for encouraging pollinators. Because the focus was on the producing landscape, urban areas were left out of this report; the focus is on pressures and opportunities in a working landscape. The solutions presented are those that would be implemented in a “perfect world” and from the perspective of Xerces. The report recommendations are not intended to be incorporated directly into our plan, but to serve as guidance in preparing our plan. The report is intended to have applicability to Yolo County and also beyond Yolo County.

At the request of the SAC, the Agriculture-Habitat Interface Working Group conducted a preliminary review of the report and submits the following comments for consideration by the SAC:

Review of “Pollinator Conservation Strategy”* by Agricultural Habitat Interface Working Group

**Report prepared by the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation for YNHP HCP/NCCP, November 2009.*

Strong Points

1. All practices are voluntary and incentive-based.

These strategies are an important element for supporting ecological functions in the landscape as part of our overall approach.

Red Flags (potential problem areas)

1. The recommended management strategy may conflict with standard agricultural practices.
2. Encouraging pollinators could encourage pest proliferation.
3. Effects on adjacent landowners are not adequately addressed.
4. The report lacks a plan for continued long-term maintenance, including estimate of cost and assignment of responsibilities and description of an enforcement mechanism.
5. Contradictory or impractical management recommendations are confusing; lack of consistency throughout the report.

General Critique of Approach

1. Definitions need more precision (e.g. “scrub” vs. “scrubland” vs. “chaparral”).
2. Information needs to be specifically for Yolo County pollinators.
3. Provide more detail on individual species’ life cycles as a basis for developing reasonable and acceptable strategies.
4. Actions in urban areas are not targeted sufficiently.
5. Riparian areas are inadequately addressed.
6. This strategy does not address *other* beneficial insects; this information needs to be included.
7. The report needs an expanded Executive Summary; also a life cycle table for individual species would be useful.

DISCUSSION

Comment: For our purposes, we need to be more focused on how we encourage pollinators and stewardship of pollinator habitat in our community. Our plan could provide incentives to the farming sector to participate in farming practices that are beneficial to pollinators. We could also encourage such practices in non-farm areas (e.g. roadsides). However, referencing the plan “as is” is more problematic because of the interface with standard agricultural practices. This report is a good source of information, but we should develop an independent set of policies specifically aimed at Yolo County.

Response: We are not allowed to reference a side document in our plan. We need to glean and restate parts that we agree with. We can refer to it as a background document – a foundational document to begin the conversation.

Comment: It should be made clear that none of these strategies would be required and that they are voluntary.

This is an opportunity to “educate” the Fish & Wildlife Service about the role of agriculture in providing habitat. It is a good idea to rework this so that is more acceptable for our purposes. It is a great good faith effort.

It would be more valuable if it were written in more widely understood language – more of a commonsense language than that of the Xerces report.

We are looking for potential in the agricultural landscape for pollinator habitat to be supported and encouraged, although not in every facet of the agricultural landscape.

“Resiliency” would be achieved by including non-agricultural areas (e.g. bike paths, urban parks) for encouragement of native California plantings to promote pollinator habitat. Another strategy is to encourage low impact development practices (e.g. Green Roof).

It is important to note that this is not intended as “mitigation” for an impact.

Comment: Hedgerow Farms has been promoting beneficial insect habitat since the 1980s. Education is needed about ecosystem services provided by pollinators, which could have a lot of resonance for farmers. We might be successful in getting broad support for this approach. For example, pollinator habitat is of great benefit for beekeepers, who could be allies in this area. Urban people don’t understand about the good that bees do for crops. Educational programs would help to promote the potential for habitat restoration for pollinators.

Comment: We could provide a more practical approach with specific “how to” instructions and information about life cycle, life history and more details, which would be helpful in implementing the strategy.

Comment: Some settings are on bare soil, some on cover; some on canopy, etc. We want to promote a diverse array of pollinator habitats. We might list what different factors should be considered over the course of the year, including listing things that really disturb pollinators. However, we don’t want to indict agriculture. We might consider enrolling growers into 5-to-10-year to protect and restore pollinator habitats. This would enable funding to be requested and provide opportunities for research. We wouldn’t link it to permitting, but over time, synergy and benefits may emerge for achieving our overall conservation goals.

Revising the pollinator report is not a priority at present, but we may use the report as a basis for developing a strategy for our plan. Pollinator habitat may converge with other goals such as restoring native habitat, conserving vernal pools, etc.

6. Presentation and review of conservation strategy framework: Overview and Organization

Dan Airola and Pete Rawlings [SAIC] [see ppt handout]

Components of the conservation strategy include plan-wide measures, landscape unit measures, and species conservation measures. Plan-wide measures apply to all areas, (e.g. wetlands issues, raptor nest avoidance, heritage trees ordinance).

Landscape level conservation strategies are specific to particular areas and have three major components: conservation lands assembly rules, land conservation targets, and management measures. For example, for the uplands landscape unit there are 8 assembly rules: land unit size, geography distribution, elevation range, habitat diversity, ability to accommodate natural disturbance, adjacent sources of disturbance, covered species occurrence, and relationship to existing conservation areas.

There are other assembly rules or strategies for each landscape unit. These rules form the basis for selecting which lands to conserve in each landscape classification and are applied to determine conservation measures for covered species in that area.

Conservation lands are equivalent to “preserves” and include agricultural lands. The rules provide guidance for establishing priority and for developing specific strategies. Assembly rules serve as a continuous reference source as the conservation strategy proceeds.

DISCUSSION

Comment: The term “acquiring land” has negative connotations for farmers – we may wish to try to insert different language. It is important to develop a vocabulary that is “friendly” to our constituents.

Response: This is a term of art which is part of the nomenclature that has developed in the HCP/NCCP world – technical jargon. We have to say what we mean and mean what we say!

Comment: Since we are relying so heavily on agriculture to meet habitat requirements, we need to be careful not to convey the notion that we seek to “acquire” agricultural land.

Response: Other plans have developed brochures aimed at communicating the goals and alleviating the concerns of the public. Goals, objectives, targets, are at the beginning of each chapter. The scheme for organizing the HCP/NCCP plan is similar to the organization of County General Plans.

Comment: The manner in which the plan is presented to the public, and especially to the agricultural community, is crucial. Also, it needs to be written in language that can be clearly understood.

Comment: The term “Yolo NHP landscape units” in the “upland” category is a scheme based on elevation. It may be better to break down areas first by elevation and then by sub-areas within the elevation category (e.g. riparian, etc.).

Response: The decision to establish these categories was derived from the need to make it workable and to assist in identifying which lands should be conserved, how much, and how they should be managed.

Comment: This approach is on a very broad scale. Much more detail at a different scale would be useful.

Response: The dominant land use is irrigated agricultural. Uplands areas are landscape which is not irrigated. It is a struggle to find a logical approach.

Question: What about species diversity (including non-covered species)? Pollinator habitat is a good example of this issue. Also “connectivity” should be more explicit (e.g. the relationship to existing conservation areas).

Response: “Habitat diversity” is a surrogate for species diversity. The implementing entity could broaden the rules to encompass this approach. It’s a balancing act because all of these commitments require management and support in the future.

We apply the assembly rules to try to come up with a process to select certain lands, to determine how much (acreage), and which strategies are the best for achieving our goals. This approach does not preclude targeting specific areas of special concern.

Question: How do we know if we have sufficient amount of “x”, “y”, or “z” to meet the species needs?

Response: We have goals for species and will iterate these goals with habitat and other factors to seek a balance.

Question: Do you see an assembly rule emerging from this iteration?

Response: There are three major components of the habitat strategy, which has been designed on an ecosystem basis:

1. How much? The goal is to conserve “xx” acres of grassland habitat in planning unit #”Z”.
2. Numbers will fluctuate depending on how much total there is to conserve, what are reasonable and feasible targets for the area.
3. Boundaries of planning units are variably defined – not on a strictly “scientific” or rigorous basis (e.g. roads, etc.)

In cases where there are unique resources, the target may be relatively high in proportion to the total amount of land in that category.

Comment: for the process for weighting the variables is designed to optimize the MARXAN formula, which is an intuitive, expert-based process. The scale effect of boundary lines is crucial and has substantial implications for the outcome of the analysis. For example, an artificial boundary can skew the way in which targets are achieved. The underlying assumptions are important factors in the process.

Response: The implementing entity has to take advantage of the situation based on realities “on the ground.” Flexibility is part of the adaptive management plan. Issues related to management measures will be difficult. Landowners may not be amenable to specific measures in easement arrangements. We will need to have more options in the range of “guidance” and “suggestions.” We have no way to predict the long-term future for easement lands.

There are a number of tools available for reaching the desired outcomes (e.g. fee simple, intensive easements). For example, we need less land if it is high quality land.

Comment: You can create easements and better value in easements, as well as responsible management with proper incentives.

7. Working Group Reports

- *Biological Working Group*
- The Biological Working Group will review basic conservation issues for the upland conservation strategy. They plan to meet in the Conference Room at the Yolo County offices located at 600 A St. in Davis on Wednesday, April 7.
- *Agricultural-Habitat Interface Working Group*

The Agriculture-Habitat Interface Working Group has been considering a range of agricultural issues that are important to the YNHP plan. At their last meeting on March 10, they reviewed the "Pollinator Conservation Strategy" report (see above under Agenda item #5). At the next meeting (scheduled for March 24, 2010), they will discuss issue #3: The role of government constraints and support for agriculture (e.g. Williamson Act, tax rate, parcel regulations) in shaping agricultural management and practices.

This information will be compiled into a report to the SAC with the other issues at the end of this cycle of meetings.

The next meeting will be held on March 24, 3:00 pm, at 120 W. Main St., Suite C, Woodland.

- *Urban Interface Working Group*

This group will revisit covered activities and discuss governance issues when they resume meeting. A meeting date has not been scheduled at this time.

8. Public Comment

None at this time.

9. Announcements and Updates

Dan Efseaff has left the Yolo RCD to take another position. We are pleased to welcome Jeannette Wrynski back as the RCD representative to the SAC.

10. Summary and Next Steps

The Third Riparian Conservation Strategy Workshop is scheduled for Monday, April 12 at 4 pm. A "straw proposal" for a riparian habitat conservation strategy for the YNHP plan will be presented for review at that meeting.

11. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.